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## Pop and Politics in Late Soviet Society

Guest Editors:

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Popular culture is a multifaceted, global phenomenon and has become a new research field in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> The term popular culture can have many different meanings, but it does imply a certain temporal context: first and foremost, it refers to the musical and artistic output of American and British society from the 1950s on, which rapidly spread to different regions of the world – including the “Eastern bloc” – through a process of cultural transfer. It is associated with such attributes as freedom or subversion, accessible to broad sections of the population, and offers lifestyles that can be adopted or adapted informally and without commitment and which therefore – at least to some extent – remain beyond the reach of political control. The articles in this volume do ask how Soviet society did change from the late 1950s on, when the state at times retreated to a *laissez-faire* position and so allowed new areas of cultural activity to emerge. Popular culture embraces here (urban) songs, dances, light reading (pulp fiction), the entertainment stage (such as cabaret and musicals), cinema, television, radio, sports, leisure activities, fashion (such as jeans and trainers, as well as hairstyles), styles of behavior, gestures, emulative postures (e.g. of cinema stars), speech patterns, jokes, narrative styles, mass graphics etc. Thus, popular culture has a much stronger link with the everyday experiences of ordinary people than is the case with what might be considered culture in an elitist sense. And a global phenomenon such as “Beatlemania” would not have been possible without the technology

for reproducing both sound and images. The issue of popular culture also raises questions of consumer habits, medialization and entertainment culture. Popular culture reflects concepts of order, patterns of interaction and shifts in mass culture through the media, consumer goods or cultural transfer. From this point of view, it is possible to analyse processes of negotiation or loyalties between state and society – as well as cultural practices – that point to hegemonic concepts, distinction or integration.

The first official Soviet Rock festival took place in March 1980 in Tbilissi, the capital of the Georgian SSR (*Vesennye ritmy*, Tbilisi-80). The winner of the festival’s competition was the group *Mashina Vremeni* (The Time Machine) from Leningrad. The journalist Artem Troitsky wrote about the event:

*“The songs performed by The Time Machine are neither wild nor soapy along the lines of ‘Why did you stand me up?’ The group abhors amplified, heavy, metallic style of playing (one wonders whether the loudness is there to compensate for lack of talent?) (p. 65) [...]*

*But songs with political and social messages have always been central to The Time Machine.*

*The group invites its audience to look closer at the world around them, at themselves, at their friends. In praising noble, good things and deeds, they urge listeners to fight evil and anything that interferes with the people’s happiness. (p. 66)”<sup>2</sup>*

Troitsky’s article was first published in the Soviet magazine *Klub I khudozhestvennaia*

1 *Handbuch Popkultur*, eds.. Thomas Hecken, Marcus Kleiner, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017; A companion to popular culture, ed. Gary Burns, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016, *Hochkultur für das Volk? Literatur, Kunst und Musik in der Sowjetunion aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, eds. Igor V. Narskij, Jörn Ketterath, München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018.

2 Winner of the national pop festival award in Tbilissi 1980, group Time Machine (*Mashina Vremeni* with frontman Andrei Makarevich). Artem Troitsky, “New Leader on the Soviet Pop Scene”, *Sputnik* 8, 1981, pp. 62-66. (Originally published in *Klub I khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel’nost’*, here p. 66. [Original translation from Sputnik.]

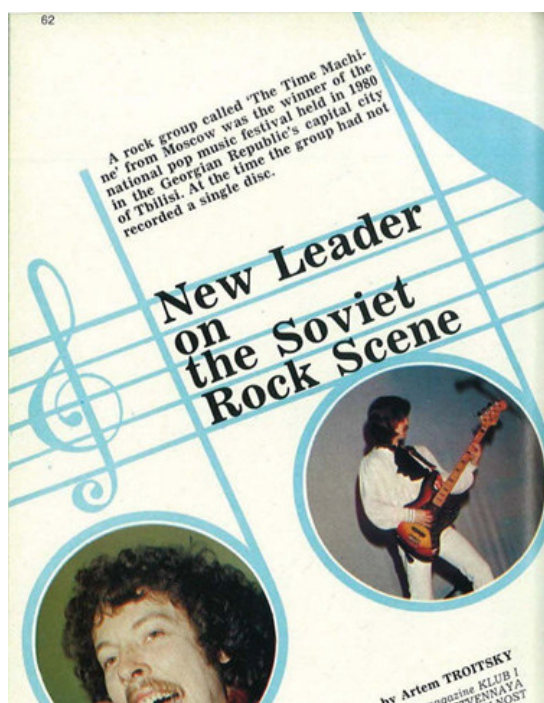


Figure 1: "New Leader on the Soviet Rock Scene". Article written by Artem Troitsky in *Sputnik*, August 1980, reporting about the Tbilisi festival.

*samodeiatelnost'*, later translated into English and published for a foreign audience in *Sputnik, Digest of the Soviet Press*. The author wrote important books about Soviet pop culture,<sup>3</sup> and what is interesting: he was himself one of the organizers of the Tbilisi festival.

We can assume that there were official frames how to write about such a unique event. So when reading Troitsky's article, the audience got to know not only news in the field of Soviet mass culture, but also official values, transmitted by party or state institutions and checked by censors before getting published. Troitsky wrote about the band, its members like Andrei Makarevich and their music, but how he did it says a lot about official norms in the late Brezhnev period: implicitly the loudness,

3 Artemy Troitsky, *Tusovka: who's who in the new Soviet rock culture*, London: Omnibus Press, 1990.

wildness and the whole style was criticized and slightly tolerated, which tells the reader that there existed another understanding of culture. The short quotes give an idea how pop culture was officially regarded in the late Soviet Union before Perestroika, where culture was part of state politics and seen as a top down process.

According to Marxist-Leninist ideology there existed two different, antagonistic understandings of culture. In the Soviet encyclopedia of 1973 this distinction was explained. First a bourgeois understanding of culture was explained, which had due to the Soviet perspective a bad impact on youth and elites as it was nihilistic, a counter-culture and liked to resist authorities.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Marxist definition of culture regarded it as a mirror for the human development. The target was the creation of a new man (*formirovanie novogo cheloveka*)<sup>5</sup> with high educational standards, mores, good behavior and wide knowledge. In the context of the 1980 festival, a dissolution of this polarized understanding of culture gets visible, even though the critique tries to rely on still defined normative standards. The festival itself was marginalized and took place without a broader audience. But official cultural institutions had at least to accept the wish of young people and other members of the Soviet society for pop and rock culture. Thus Tbilisi 1980 can be regarded as a turning point in Soviet cultural politics, even though changes took place in a grassroot manner long before.<sup>6</sup>

Already in the late Stalin period, in the years after the Second World War, the phenomenon

4 *Bol'shaia sovetskaia encyklopedia*, Moscow: Sovetskaya Encyklopedia 1973, 3. ed., t. 13, p. 595.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 596, column 1775.

6 Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945-1970*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016, p. 9.



of the *Stiliagi* (style hunters) occurred.<sup>7</sup> There are no reliable numbers how many young people tried to be different from norms and propaganda by dressing stylish, listening to western music, hanging around in Gorkii street in Moscow and performing unusual dances in that time. Supposedly there were only a few, small, marginal groups in urban places, mostly young men. However, in the reception of the Soviet past this juvenile subculture became a myth, not least via the music film *Stiliagi* from 2008.

The influence of Rock 'n' Roll on Soviet culture was observed by foreign journalists. Klaus Mehnert, born 1906 in Moscow,<sup>8</sup> was a German expert for the Soviet Union. As a member of an official German delegation accompanying chancellor Konrad Adenauer, he visited Moscow in 1955. He walked around and listened to normal people. After his return to West Germany, Mehnert produced a 90 minutes radio feature based on his talks to Muscovites.<sup>9</sup> Beyond political comments he talked about the daily life and moods of the people. During his walks in Moscow he visited a *Park Kul'tury* (it was not Gorkii park), a leisure place with sport facilities, a dance floor and kiosks. Mehnert made some unexpected findings. First he listened to a waltz from Isaak Dunaevski (1900-1955), the famous composer who had died recently.<sup>10</sup> He met citizens singing *Shirokaia moia strana*, a patriotic hit from the 1930s<sup>11</sup>. "And suddenly there were

sounds of contemporary dance rhythms" Mehnert told in the feature, "similar to jazz music from the 1930s, a well-known melody. I listened to 'In the Mood' from Glenn Miller." He went to the conductor looking for the name of the music piece. The title written on the notes was "Satirical Song" composed by Ostrovskii. But it was indeed "In the Mood", only hidden as a parody. This episode shows how official rules could be undermined by tricks like trivializing the "bourgeois" culture, using Aesopian language in literature or discrediting objects of desire which could be shown in such a way at the same time.

A real fanal for the new politics after the repressive Stalin regime was the World Youth Festival taking place in Moscow 1957.<sup>12</sup>

The international meeting of young people from all over the world was a showcase for the political change under Khrushchev. It resigned from obvious political propaganda for the socialist model. Instead, slogans for peace and mutual understanding were the motto of the two weeks meeting. Visitors were impressed by the peaceful atmosphere in festival Moscow, the sport and folklore presentations, the happenings on the streets, the opportunity to meet people from many Soviet republics and different countries.<sup>13</sup> Officials made many efforts to show a proper city (cleaning it in advance from prostitutes, criminals and beggars), a perfect organization and the achievements of the Soviet system in times of the cultural cold war. But they could not influence the reception nor the consequences

7 Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow. The Birth and Life of the Stiljagi. 1945-1953", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50, 1, 2002, pp. 37-61; see also the cartoons from Krokodil on <http://www.coldwarjazz.org/stilyagi>.

8 He died in 1984.

9 "Wiedersehen mit der Sowjetunion". Radio feature from Klaus Mehnert, Germany 1955. Private holding of the author.

10 Matthias Stadelmann, *Isaak Dunaevskij, Sänger des Volkes: Eine Karriere unter Stalin*, Köln: Böhlau 2003.

11 The song about the Fatherland was composed

for the popular movie *Cirk* (Circus) in 1936, the composer was as well Isaak Dunaevskii.

12 Pia Koivunen, "The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival. Propagating a new, peaceful image of the Soviet Union", *Soviet state and society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilic, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 46-65.

13 Leo Weismantel, *Tagebuch einer skandalösen Reise*, Jugendheim: Weltkreis Verlags GmbH, 1959.



Figure 2: Article in the women's journal *Rabotnica*, March 1957, announcing the upcoming International Youth Festival in Moscow.

of the event. In the west, the Youth Festival was regarded as part of communist policies. In Switzerland for example, visitors coming back by train were "expected" by angry Swiss citizens, beating on the travelers who dared to cross the iron curtain.<sup>14</sup> All Youth Festivals organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth had a socialist connotation and were perceived as a mega event in the communist part of the divided world.

Important waves of global popular culture such as new fashion trends, Rock 'n' Roll,

<sup>14</sup> Unpublished paper from Nadine Steinmann, Bern 2017.

the Beatles, Hippies, Rock, Disco, Punk or Heavy Metal entered the Soviet Union quite promptly and inspired Soviet artists to create new cultural forms themselves. The children or members of elites who could travel to eastern bloc countries, tourists, journalists or diplomats imported tapes, discs, magazines, pictures, films, fashion or their own experiences. Beneath such personal cultural transfers regions or cities on the border of the Soviet Union like Lviv in Western Ukraine, Estonia or port cities were gates for trends and products coming from the near abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Recent research has come up with many propositions of how to define "pop culture". John Storey gives a good survey about different approaches.<sup>16</sup> He distinguishes between:

- (1) a quantitative approach, defining relevance by numbers and empirical data. But this might not explain the meanings and not any mass phenomena has the same relevance.

- (2) an approach focusing on the definition of high culture, fixing a hierarchy of a superior and inferior culture. This scheme means at the same time a typology for classes. And it neglects that cultural production and meanings are not ahistorical or fix, but shift through different times. An example is the perception of Shakespeare or Charles Dickens as popular writers and today part of a high culture.

- (3) an approach that sees pop culture as mass culture, only for economic purposes and

<sup>15</sup> William Jay Risch, "Soviet 'Flower Children'. Hippies and the Youth Counter-Culture in 1970s L'viv", *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 3, 2005, pp. 565-584; William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: culture and the fate of empire in Soviet Lviv*, Cambridge, Mass. 2011; Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and roll in the Rocket City: The West, identity and ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> John Storey, *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*, Harlow: Pearson/Longman 2009 (5th ed.).



Figure 3: Moscow Youth Festival 1957: Official photo published by Leo Weismantel, who participated in the event.

mass consumption. This connotation is often used with a traditional connotation that mass culture is American culture and goes together with processes of Americanization since the 1950s. The new American way of life seemed more exciting than the well-known every day culture. Popular culture configured as a collective dream world and mutated as such to a form of escapism.

(4) an approach that understands pop culture as folk culture, coming from the people and understood as authentic.

(5) an approach following Antonio Gramsci, seeing pop culture as a concept of hegemony, an interdependence between resistance and incorporation or at least (6) as culture of industrialization and urbanization.

Which approach is making most sense always

depends on questions, targets, sources and methodologies.

For the Soviet context, John Fiske's understanding of pop culture is of special interest. Fiske develops a theoretical framework in order to better understand culture as a social process:

*Culture making (and culture is always in process, never achieved) is a social process: all meanings of self, of social relations, all the discourses and texts that play such important cultural roles can circulate only in relationship to the social system. [...]*

*Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control,*





Figure 4: “Hippi”. Article in the Lithuanian magazine *Mokslas ir gyvenimas* (Science and life), 1967, mentioning hippies for the first time.

*that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology.[...] Popular culture is made in relationship to structures of dominance. This relationship can take two main forms – that of resistance or evasion.*<sup>17</sup>

Fiske provides a definition of pop culture as part of culture as such, a culture as practice. It is not only about phenomena, actors, forms, aesthetics, trends, fashions, traditions, performances, medialization, marketing and politics, but allows insights in society. Pop culture relates to different forms of culture in

a society, is part of a larger understanding. Structures like the relation between leadership and society, the different groups in a society, mechanisms of integration or marginalization, the production of social meanings, counter positions to state politics and escapism from it can get visible with Fiskes definition.

In the Soviet Union, pop culture was a counterpart to the official mass culture. Since 1934, the latter had been based on the paradigm of socialist realism which ended earlier cultural experiments, for example those associated with the notion of *proletkul't*. What is more, till the breakdown of the Soviet Union we find a distinction (and strict hierarchy) between high culture, such as classical ballet, literature or classical music and

<sup>17</sup> John Fiske: *Understanding popular culture*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 1-2.



mass culture. A similar understanding of “high culture” can be seen in the first theoretical texts about mass culture, written by Horkheimer and Adorno.<sup>18</sup> In his American exile Adorno could study new forms of mass culture which he described as pure consumption, profit oriented, an industrial product which supports conformity instead of individualism. His ideal was high culture understood as art whereas mass culture was only entertainment and completely depoliticizing. Adorno criticized the homogenization of taste, opinions and political thinking by mass cultural products.

The contributions to this volume shed light on different aspects of Soviet popular and mass culture. Gleb Tsipursky, the author of the book *Socialist fun*<sup>19</sup> gives insights in the Thaw period where the so called cultural cold war tried to influence the societies of the “others”. Even though Soviet people were fascinated by the real or imagined west they also appreciated their genuine cultural stars like the famous bards Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotskii, as Danijela Lugarić Vukas’ contribution shows. Irina Mukhina asks for consumer practices and shows the importance of port cities as market places. Sergei I. Zhuk opens insights into popular culture in Soviet Ukraine, Kirsten Bönker and Kristian Feigelson describe the meaning of Soviet TV as a new media since the 1960s. Isabelle De Keghel explores a famous Soviet TV series (*Seventeen Moments of Spring*), Aimar Ventsel deals with Estonian popular culture. Boris Belge and Tatjana Hofmann both look on more classical cultural products, the music of the famous composer Alfred Schnittke and the literature from Vasilii Aksënov.

18 Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969.

19 Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun*.

For the future we need a better understanding of the exchange processes who are too often regarded as one sided from the west to the east. But if we look at the time period before the Second World War we have an exchange other way round as well.<sup>20</sup> To understand adaptations, impulses, traditions, inventions and translations inspired by new trends the concept of contact zones from Mary Pratt<sup>21</sup> could be useful as well, as we avoid a container thinking of culture in clear cut boxes. The political debates about culture in the Soviet Union and the role of official institutions, responsible persons and controversies have also to be researched in the future.

The articles published here were originally presented on a conference about pop culture in 2013 at the University of St. Gallen. It is a contribution to the steadily growing field of popcultural studies who too often still focus on western Europe. We find a lot of pop culture in Eastern Europe as well which is unfortunately often unknown in the west like popular TV series, cartoons, famous singers and music groups with their own rock stars. Main questions were the following:

How did Soviet society change from the late 1950s on, when the state at times retreated to a laissez-faire position and so allowed new areas of cultural activity to emerge? What trends were there, and who set them? How was taste discussed, and how did fan-based communities come into being? What was the relationship between the new cultural dynamics and the discourse of ideology and the politics of identity? Was Soviet popular culture an expression of subversion and protest? Did it tend to break down the system,

20 Birgit Menzel, Ulrich Schmid, “Der Osten im Westen. Importe der Populärkultur”, *Osteuropa* 57, 5, 2007, pp. 3-21.

21 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession*, 1991, pp. 33-40.

or rather to exert a stabilizing influence? How did popular culture influence people's lifestyles and leisure activities? How can processes of cultural transfer – such as between east and west – be described? What autonomous developments took place?

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# Fighting Western Fashion in the Soviet Union: The Komsomol, Westernized Youth, and the Cultural Cold War in the Mid-1950s

by Gleb Tsipursky

## Abstract

This paper proposes that the mid-1950s drive to combat extreme devotion to western fashion constituted part of the endeavor to build a broadly appealing socialist version of modernity in the “Thaw,” the decade and a half following I. V. Stalin’s death in 1953 and the rise of N. S. Khrushchev to power. This Thaw-era drive for a socialist modernity involved forging a society, culture, and a way of life widely perceived at home and abroad as progressive and advanced, and as offering a viable alternative to the predominant western paradigm. The end goals of this post-Stalin endeavor to construct an appealing socialist alternative involved reaching the utopia of communism, a drive that stagnated under Stalin, while also winning the Cold War and in the process spreading the Soviet model of socialist modernity across the globe.

**Keywords:** socialist modernity, fashion, thaw, cold war culture.

“Let’s Talk About Tastes and Manners” was the title of a 1956 youth event at the Labor Reserves Central House of Culture. At this meeting, “all those present condemned the devotion of certain comrades with ‘ultramodern’ fashion”, instead endorsing the opinion that “dressing well means dressing in a tasteful, not flashy, manner”.<sup>1</sup> This report about the meeting comes from *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, the national newspaper of the Komsomol.<sup>2</sup> One among many such articles in youth newspapers in the mid-1950s, it suggests the importance of fashion both to the authorities and to young people alike. In particular, this story highlights the problem of “ultramodern” attire, a euphemism for western-style clothing; it also suggests some of the ways that the Soviet system during these years fought against youth fascination

with such styles, namely through public condemnation. The abovementioned article thus embodies the two central questions at the heart of the present essay. First, why was it important for the Soviet state of the mid-1950s to define appropriate clothing? Second, what methods did it apply to do so? To answer these questions, the essay draws on archives, newspapers, instruction booklets, memoirs, and interviews.<sup>3</sup>

The present paper proposes that the efforts to combat extreme devotion to western fashion in the mid-1950s constituted part of the endeavor to build a broadly appealing socialist version of modernity in the “Thaw”, the decade and a half following I. V. Stalin’s death in 1953 and the rise of N. S. Khrushchev to power.<sup>4</sup> This Thaw-era quest for a socialist

1 “Pogovorim o vkusakh i manerakh”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, February 3, 1956.

2 This mass Soviet youth organization was dedicated to socializing young people from fifteen to twenty-eight. In 1958, the Komsomol included about half of those eligible by age. Membership in the Komsomol had substantial benefits for those seeking upward social mobility and white-collar professional careers. For more on the Komsomol, see Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism, 1945-56*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 32-63.

3 The archives include: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI); Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI); Tsentral’nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy (TsAOPIM); Tsentral’nyi arkhiv gosudarstva Moskvy (TsAGM); Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii saratovskoi oblasti (GANISO).

4 This essay adopts the term “Thaw” to convey the series of thaws and chills in this ambiguous and multivalent, but overall more pluralistic era. For more on this term, see Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press,



modernity involved forging a society, culture, and a way of life widely perceived at home and abroad as offering a viable alternative to the predominant western paradigm in the Cold War context.<sup>5</sup>

An essential aspect of building a socialist version of modernity involved creating young model citizens, "New Soviet People", fit for constructing and living in the upcoming communist utopia. In doing so, the Soviet party-state complex, the combination of government institutions and Communist Party-controlled social organizations such as trade unions and the Komsomol, sought to reshape youth cultural tastes, and thus identities, to fit prescribed notions of appropriate norms.<sup>6</sup> Several recent studies have shed significant light on youth identities and cultural practices in the postwar decades.<sup>7</sup> However, there has been a lack of studies examining the perspective of and efforts by the authorities to remake youth tastes.

My essay also contributes to the field of socialist fashion. Much excellent literature has appeared on the post-Stalin turn to satisfying

consumer desires and tastes in fashion.<sup>8</sup> Still, such works have not undertaken in-depth examinations of the symbolic and physical violence exerted by the party-state to combat the tastes and preferences of those who refused to follow official prescriptions.<sup>9</sup>

A focus on the latter issue enables this paper to make another historiographic intervention, joining the recent scholarship that rejects previous depictions of the Thaw as a time of liberalism by pointing to elements of continuing and even increasing coercion during this era.<sup>10</sup> A number of scholars have pointed to the growing role of collective surveillance and volunteer policing as increasing the prevalence of social control at the daily level under Khrushchev.<sup>11</sup> These

8 Larissa Zakharova, "Dior in Moscow: A Taste for Luxury in Soviet Fashion under Khrushchev", *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010, pp. 95-121; L. B. Brusilovskaia, *Kul'tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "ottepeli": Metamorfozy stilia*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo URAO, 2001, pp. 169-74; S. V. Zhuravlev and Jukka Gronow, "Krasota pod kontrolem gosudarstva: Osobennosti i etapi stanovleniia sovetskoi mody", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 32.1, 2005, pp. 1-92; Olga Gurova, "The Art of Dressing: Body, Gender and Discourse on Fashion in Soviet Russia in the 1950s and 60s", *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, Globalization*, eds. Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, New York: Berg, 2008, pp. 73-91.

9 Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, this essay defines symbolic violence as coercion via means other than physical force: see his *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 1-27.

10 Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009; Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

11 Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 279-302; Gleb Tsipursky, "Citizenship, Deviance, and Identity: Soviet Youth Newspapers as Agents of Social Control in the Thaw-Era Leisure Campaign", *Cahiers du monde russe* 49.4, October-December 2008, pp.

2008, pp. 1-13.

5 On socialist modernity, see David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 3.

6 For the role of taste in shaping identity, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 466-84; Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 163-68.

7 Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010; William J. Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; Gleb Tsipursky, *Having Fun in the Thaw: Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years*, in the series *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, No. 2201, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

works have not yet sufficiently explored the official perspectives on the struggle with “ultramodern” fashion among youngsters. Finally, this paper considers the Cold War implications of Soviet youth wearing styles perceived as western. The historiography on the Cold War’s cultural struggle has made great advances within the last decades, convincingly showing the vital role played by the cultural front in shaping the nature and outcome of this conflict. The large majority of extant literature focuses on the production of western cultural propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Some pioneering works have begun to uncover the complex question of the actual fruits of this propaganda for Soviet daily cultural life.<sup>13</sup> Yet this area requires much more research, enabling my study to expand the available historiography, especially in regard to how the Soviet authorities sought to present an image abroad of Soviet domestic cultural practices as worthy of respect and emulation, an aspect of foreign policy known as cultural diplomacy, as part of the party-state’s effort to offer an appealing socialist modernity to the outside world.

### The context for and the launch of the mid-1950s campaign

In the immediate postwar period, young upper-class men and some women in the USSR

became fascinated with western European and American popular culture.<sup>14</sup> The party-controlled press disparagingly homogenized such young people with the label of “stiliagi” (or the ‘style-obsessed’). A notorious 1949 article in the satirical journal *Krokodil* set the standard for the definitions of stiliagi in official discourse. The piece described a male youth clothed in a jacket with an orange back and green sleeves, yellowish-green pants, and socks in colors suggestive of the American flag. The article censured stiliagi for “being familiar with fashion of all countries and times” and for “developing their own style in clothing, conversations, and manners”, where “the main thing is to not be like normal people.”<sup>15</sup> This narrative makes references to the most important signifiers in actual stiliagi cultural practices, most notably fashion.

Somewhat surprisingly in the context of the wide-ranging anti-cosmopolitan campaign against western cultural influence launched in 1946, these youngsters drew little attention from the postwar Stalin leadership. Several factors explain this: first, the late Stalinist state was always reluctant to publicize social problems; second, the demands of postwar reconstruction occupied much of its attention; third, many of the early stiliagi were the children of party elites.<sup>16</sup> Though

629-49.

12 Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

13 Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 66-267; Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 79-167.

14 Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50.1, 2002, pp. 37-61; Gleb Tsipursky, “Living ‘America’ in the Soviet Union: The Cultural Practices of ‘Westernized’ Soviet Youth, 1945-1964”, *The Soviet Union & The United States: Rivals of the Twentieth Century. Coexistence & Competition*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg, New York: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 139-64.

15 “Stiliagi”, *Krokodil*, March 10, 1949.

16 Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 1-51; N. I. Nikolaeva, “Nekotorye itogi antiamerikanskoi kampanii v SSSR v kontse 40kh-nachale 50kh godov”, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, eds. A. V. Gladyshev and V. S. Mirzekhanov, Saratov: Izdatel’stvo Saratovskogo universiteta,

some criticism of westernized youth in newspapers did appear with the launch of the antic cosmopolitanism campaign, it likely reached its apogee with the 1949 article, decreasing afterward.<sup>17</sup>

However, soon after Stalin's death the new leadership rapidly launched a new public drive against all sorts of youth misbehavior, including stiliagi-like behavior, most notably targeting fashion. The keynote speech of the 1954 Twelfth Komsomol Congress, in contrast to the lack of criticism at the 1949 Eleventh Komsomol Congress, strongly condemned "young men with Tarzan-style haircuts dressed up like parrots, the so-called 'stiliagi'".<sup>18</sup> Regional Komsomol committee conferences sent similar messages: for example, in contradiction to the lack of criticism of stiliagi in the keynote speech of the December 1952 Saratov Komsomol city conference, the keynote speaker at the December 1953 conference disparaged "young women and men, with so much make-up that they are unrecognizable, garbed in wild costumes."<sup>19</sup> The Komsomol strengthened its anti-stiliagi campaign with an August 1955 closed letter to branch Komsomol organizations that demanded the intensification of the struggle against young people who "lead a party lifestyle", a euphemism for stiliagi.<sup>20</sup>

This new campaign was all the more remarkable owing to the warming relations with non-socialist states in the early Thaw and the accompanying tolerance for elements of western popular culture in Soviet life, unimaginable during the Stalinist

anticosmopolitan campaign.<sup>21</sup> As part of this transformation, outsiders traveled to the Soviet Union in growing numbers. In particular, post-Stalin public diplomacy encouraged western youth associations to send delegations to the Soviet Union, perceiving such institutional ties as helping legitimate the USSR in the eyes of the outside world. However, the outcome of these trips did not always go as planned by the Soviet party-state. In one instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that a member of a visiting delegation of English students, after returning home, published an article in the English newspaper *Observer* entitled "Speculators and Hooligans". This story related how a small minority of Soviet youth tried to emulate western ways in a "vulgar and loud" manner and attempted to purchase western products from foreign visitors. The ministry suggested that youth organizations deal with these problems.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, western newspapers kept publishing stories about Soviet youth who longed for western material and cultural products.<sup>23</sup> This undoubtedly drew top-level ire as undermining the Soviet Cold War cultural diplomacy efforts.

Still, while the number of young people fascinated with western styles did rise after 1953, the gradual rate of this increase suggests that this factor had no more than a secondary part in the rapid launch of the new measures targeting stiliagi. Instead, the coming to

2004, pp. 100-12.

17 Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, pp. 200-249.

18 A. N. Shelepin, *Otchetnyi doklad TsK VLKSM XII s'ezdu komsomola*, Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1954, p. 48.

19 GANISO, f. 4529, op. 10, d. 6, l. 218.

20 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 878, ll. 76-78.

21 Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies*, Moscow, 1955 and 1999, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, pp. 39-82; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Insider Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2006, p. 5-32; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 62-94.

22 RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 179, l. 87.

23 "Moscow's Jet Set Rides High", *The New York Times*, November 4, 1956.



power of the new leadership and its decisive turn toward forging a socialist modernity through re-launching the drive to construct communism and win the Cold War played the central role. The 1955 letter itself presents the motivation as inherently ideological, linking the current “concluding stage of the construction of socialism and gradual transition to communism” to the need for a “decisive struggle with” youth misbehavior.<sup>24</sup> The resolution of the Seventh Komsomol Central Committee plenum of 1957 underscored the need to struggle with misbehavior “with all our might, because it is especially intolerable right now, when the country is coming closer and closer to communism everyday.”<sup>25</sup> In a March 1957 speech at a conference of the Moscow Komsomol city committee, the First Secretary and thus leader of the Komsomol A. N. Shelepin demanded that “Komsomol organizations lead the struggle against blindly kowtowing to all that is western.”<sup>26</sup> Such evidence underscores that the rapid shifts in discourse and policy against stiliagi after Stalin’s death reflect the changes taking place at the top. This indicates the need to nuance the conclusions of those recent publications that consider Thaw-era innovations as primarily structurally-determined policies evolving organically from broader processes associated with postwar reconstruction as opposed to the result of a conscious new course by the post-Stalin Kremlin.<sup>27</sup>

24 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 878, l. 79.

25 Ibid., d. 930, l. 6.

26 TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 13, d. 546, ll. 13-17, 44-45.

27 Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, pp. 20-29; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 296-336.

### Enacting the mid-1950s campaign against stiliagi

The anti-stiliagi drive resulted in newspapers deploying symbolic violence as a means of using the power of public censure, humiliation, and shame, a sharp break with the late Stalinist practices of avoiding publicizing social problems. Less than two months after Stalin’s death the Moscow Komsomol city committee’s paper published a mocking poem entitled “Stiliaga” about a young person whose costume “is reminiscent of a peacock’s tail.”<sup>28</sup> The national Komsomol organ published an article that harshly criticized a youth for legally changing his name to Andre Johnson Rockefeller, wearing “narrow pants with zippers”, and harassing women.<sup>29</sup> Newspapers also reproached female stiliagi, as in a published letter from a group of young women ashamed of their friend, Valia. According to this denunciation, Valia wears excessive makeup and shows too much of her body.<sup>30</sup> The publication of a multitude of response letters condemning Valia patently illustrates the intentions of the press to convince readers that all worthy citizens need to participate in the collective censure of misbehaving young women.<sup>31</sup> The press disparaged stiliagi by name, printing their personal information, as in a story about Arkadii and his friends, condemned by the newspaper for illegal trading with foreign sailors “for the sake of striped socks and a dozen packs of chewing gum.”<sup>32</sup>

28 “Stiliaga”, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, April 23, 1953.

29 “Rockefeller iz Noril’ska”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, July 11, 1959.

30 “Nam stydno za podrugy”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, June 21, 1955.

31 For the responses, see “Net, eto nashe delo”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, August 11, 1955.

32 “Okhotniki za podtiazhkami”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, July 1, 1960.



Figure 1: "Stiliagi", *Zaria molodezhi*, February 17, 1957.

Editorial cartoons in newspapers visually illustrated and condemned stiliagi style and behavior. A youth newspaper in Saratov published two caricatures of stiliagi, focusing on their attire (see Figure 1).

Both images exaggerated elements to mock stiliagi styles. A more complex, multi-panel example from *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* bears the title of "What is Good and What is Bad", with the left side devoted to praiseworthy and the second to proscribed practices (see Figure 2).

The first panel denounces those who spend a great deal of time shopping and buy skimpy, western-style clothing. The second critiques people sitting by themselves at home listening and singing to boogie-woogie music. The third panel most explicitly condemns western fashion. The last panel disparages individualistic separation from the collective.

The wide reliance on public censure links directly to the Thaw-era administration's belief in the power of collective judgment in the struggle to achieve communism. At the 1957 Moscow city Komsomol conference, Shelepin cited a Chinese folk saying that states that if 1000 people point to a thief, he will die: this, according to Shelepin, "is about the great power of the collective."<sup>33</sup> The newspaper articles set the goal of helping construct a self-surveilling, authoritative collective, whose disparaging, shaming voice constitutes the only punishment necessary for correcting misbehavior in the communist utopia.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most direct means of using the symbolic violence of public opprobrium to condemn inappropriate tastes came through

33 TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 14, d. 240, ll. 44-45.

34 On surveillance managing behavior, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, pp. 178-79.

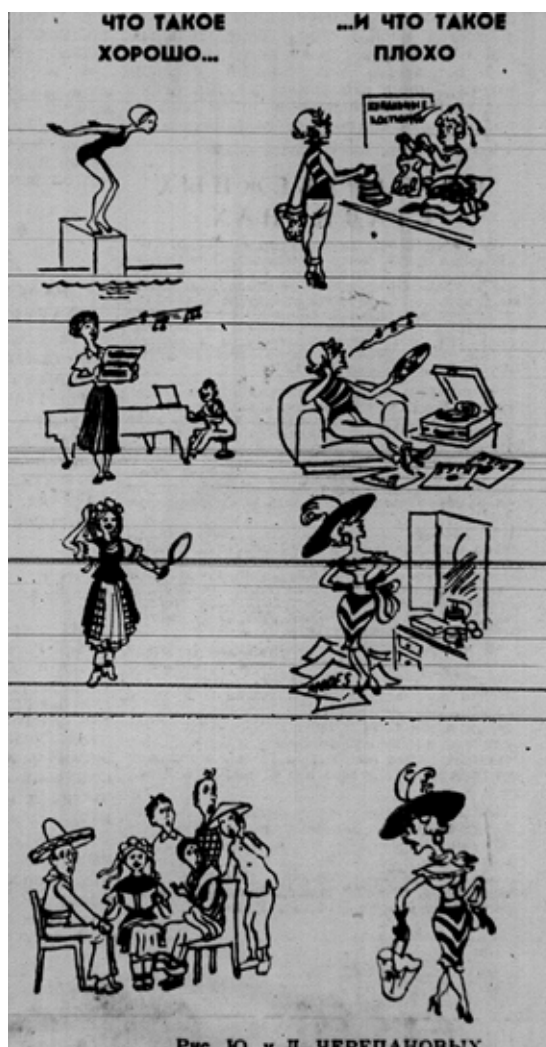


Figure 2: "Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho", *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, July 12, 1957.

direct censure of Komsomol members exhibiting stiliagi-like traits at Komsomol meetings. The Party Central Committee promoted the employment of this and similar tactics in March 1959.<sup>35</sup> Local Komsomol committee testimony depicts this range of public shaming as an effective technique.<sup>36</sup> Such symbolic violence constituted a necessary basis for mobilizing young Komsomol

members to deploy both symbolic and physical violence against youth misconduct through Komsomol-managed volunteer militias. The mid-1950s campaign against juvenile delinquency resulted in the quick organization of Komsomol patrols under the auspices of local Komsomol committees across the country. The patrols, consisting of groups of ideologically committed young volunteers, strove to monitor and police the everyday activities of youth in their free time.<sup>37</sup> At a Moscow city Komsomol conference in 1957, the Komsomol secretary of the Likhachev automobile factory described how "[we] help guys get a better haircut, with the help of scissors, of course", a euphemism for cutting off the "western" haircuts of stiliagi.<sup>38</sup> A former patrol member's memoirs relate his dislike for stiliagi: "To our high ideals [they] juxtaposed narrow pants and loud ties", and he recalls a number of fights with them.<sup>39</sup> In a press story, a Komsomol patrol "took a group of girls who danced an improper dance [meaning in a "western" style] outside the capital, and cut the hair off four of them."<sup>40</sup> The patrols deployed symbolic and physical violence to impose horizontal social controls on stiliagi and expunge this perceived deviance, thus removing the roadblocks toward the ideal

37 For more on patrols, see Juliane Fürst, "The Importance of Being Stylish: Youth, Culture and Identity in Late Stalinism", *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 209-30; Gleb Tsipursky, "Coercion and Consumption: The Khrushchev Leadership's Ruling Style in the Campaign against 'Westernized' Youth, 1954-64," *Youth, Rock, and the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. William J. Risch, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 82-127.

38 TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 13, d. 546, ll. 75-76.

39 V. E. Ronkin, *Na smenu dekabriam prikhodiat ianvari: vospominaniia byvshego brigadmir'tsa i podpol'shchika, a pozzhe – politzakliuchennogo i dissidenta*, Moscow: Obshchestvo "Memorial", Izd-vo "Zven'ia", 2003, pp. 71-74.

40 "Vospitanie... nozhnitsami", *Moskovskii komсомоlets*, February 24, 1959.

35 *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika*, Vypusk III, Moscow, 1961, pp. 577-79.

36 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 811, l. 64.



communist future and helping manage its Cold War domestic cultural front.

Soviet law enforcement also participated in the struggle against stiliagi. In 1960-61, the government passed more stringent laws against illegal products, including western goods.<sup>41</sup> A booklet describes how the police uncovered a clique of youths who bought goods and currency from foreign tourists for resale in the Soviet Union, and put them on trial.<sup>42</sup>

Still, official discourse and public policy in the Thaw opened significant room for negotiation on the extent of western style allowed in comparison to the late Stalin years. The Moscow Komsomol organ in 1955 ran a letter from a young woman in a prominent position on its front page. The letter stated that:

*Lately, many young women have begun to wear pants. Yet this clothing surprises some passersby, and occasionally one hears "stiliaga" addressed to those women. I think pants are comfortable clothes for industrial work, for housework, and, of course, for sports. If pants are convenient for working with machinery, skating, hiking, and cleaning, then you should wear them, and pay no attention to those who, because of their stagnant mindset, call such a costume stiliaga-like.*<sup>43</sup>

This and other stories in youth newspapers echoed broader debates among Soviet fashion workers and in the pages of specialized magazines on appropriate styles, which

frequently argued over the appropriateness of "western" models. These discussions helped expand greatly the amount of room for western-like fashion allowed to Soviet citizens.<sup>44</sup>

Such discussions within Soviet newspapers and journals emblemize a deliberate opening of negotiating room on the definition of stiliagi and draw attention to the Komsomol's willingness to extend a compromise to the many people tempted by some aspects of western culture yet faithful to communist ideology at heart. These youth, in other words, could still be New Soviet People while adopting a degree of western style.<sup>45</sup> At variance with the tendencies of the postwar Stalin years to totalizing exclusion, this novel Khrushchev-era approach endeavored to excise only the minority of full-fledged stiliagi who were not willing to compromise and expressed a spectacular opposition to mainstream norms. Such repression of small-scale youth cultural groupings that spectacularly went against mainstream norms paralleled some of the practices of western governments in regard to spectacularly nonconformist youth.<sup>46</sup>

44 For such debates, see Zhuravlev and Gronow, "Krasota pod kontrolem gosudarstva"; Gurova, "The Art of Dressing".

45 For similar tensions in regard to other kinds of western cultural influence, see Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, pp. 164-65.

46 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils & Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987; Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 275-309; John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1986; John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present*, New York: Academic Press Inc., 1981, pp. 132-210.

41 Harold J. Berman, *Justice in the U.S.S.R.: An Interpretation of Soviet Law*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 84-86.

42 A. Lavrov and O. Lavrova, *ChP – darmoed!* Moscow: Znanie, 1961, pp. 6-16.

43 "A kak dumaete vy?" *Moskovskii komsomolets*, March 10, 1957. For other articles where the letters of readers provide a conflicting definition of stiliagi, see *Moskovskii komsomolets*, March 13, 1957; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, July 9, 1958; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, August 6, 1958.

## Conclusion

My essay has made a number of interventions in the current scholarship. It placed the campaign in the mid-1950s against styles perceived by the hierarchy as excessively western within the broader framework of the Thaw-era endeavor to construct an appealing socialist alternative to western modernity, one attractive at home and abroad alike, as a means of winning the Cold War and building communism in the Soviet Union and across the globe. The paper proposed that forging model young Soviet citizens fit to construct communism and carry out the Cold War constituted a key component of making a socialist alternative modernity. As part of a cohesive and holistic identity, this New Soviet Person had to have appropriate cultural tastes and aesthetic preferences, the authorities believed. This meant, among other things, rejecting excessive western cultural influence, including in fashion, while opening the door to a much greater amount of western culture than permissible under Stalin.

To ensure the forging of Soviet youth into model builders of communism, the Khrushchev authorities launched the campaign against youth misbehavior in the mid-1950s, a significant part of which targeted stiliagi and their fashion. The authorities strove mightily to enforce a limit on the boundaries of acceptable clothing. This contrasted with the Stalinist period when official discourse publicly condemned western cultural influence, but the party-state did not undertake any significant and systematic measures to combat westernized youth cultural practices in fashion.

The mid-1950s campaign relied heavily on symbolic violence as expressed via the opprobrium of public discourse and official collectives as its premier tool of social control.

A crucial secondary tool consisted of social mobilization at Komsomol meetings and especially Komsomol patrols, with the latter deploying both symbolic and physical violence. Law enforcement organs provided a third, less important element, owing to the de-emphasis on state policing under Khrushchev. The new mid-1950s initiative underscores the important role that the conscious decisions of the post-Stalin leadership had on the content of central policies and the methods of enacting these in everyday life, thus shaping the frameworks of Soviet youth lives and cultural practices. However, these policies simultaneously responded to the realities of youth desires, including for western fashion, illustrating the complex process of interactions between governing structures and the population in the USSR.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gleb Tsipursky is Assistant Professor at The Ohio State University. His research focuses on the Soviet Union, and he writes about modernity, youth, popular culture, consumption, emotions, the Cold War, globalization, social control, policing, and violence. He has published over 25 peer-reviewed pieces in venues in the United States, France, Germany, Canada, England, and Russia, including the monograph *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the USSR, 1945-1970* with the University of Pittsburgh Press (2016). He is currently working on post-truth politics in a global context. He was awarded fellowships by the Kennan Institute, the American Council of Learned Societies, the International Education Program Service, and the International Research and Exchanges Board.

# Living *vnye*: The example of Bulat Okudzhava's and Vladimir Vysotskii's *avtorskaia pesnia*

by Danijela Lugarić Vukas

## Abstract

The paper analyzes *avtorskaia pesnia* as a deterritorializing milieu (A. Yurchak) par excellence. In order to address the question of heterogeneity during the late Soviet socialism, the analysis does a close reading of the poetry of two prominent Russian bards, B. Okudzhava and V. Vysotskii, paying special attention to one of the most authoritative Soviet cultural myths and ideologemes, that of "motherland" (*Rodina*).

**Keywords:** *avtorskaia pesnia*, B. Okudzhava, V. Vysotskii, motherland (*Rodina*).

In the period after Stalin's death and the crisis of the monolithic dogma of socialist realism, some of the most exciting cultural practices were associated with three cults: the cults of youth, individualism and westernness. In the following period of Stagnation (*zastoi*) and Brezhnev's less liberal political doctrine, the process of cultural disintegration was even intensified. *Avtorskaia pesnia* (literally "author's song") responded ideally to the 'zeitgeist'. It was not only close to individualism, youth culture and student population, but also to the process of cultural disintegration. *Avtorskaia pesnia* is sometimes called the poetry of wild youth. Emerging as a 'temporary autonomous zone' (cf. Hakim Bey), as part of the so-called apartment culture or the institution of communal art, it is related to the phenomenon of 'magnitizdat' (from 'magnitofon' = magnetic tape recorder and 'izda(va)t'' = to publish). It directly influenced the development of Russian rock music (it is argued that this is one of the reasons why text dominates over music in Russian rock). Moreover, due to its immense popularity, *avtorskaia pesnia* influenced contemporary Russian poetry in general. In the period of late Soviet socialism it was probably the most attractive and the most widespread form of cultural production and consumption.

Two theoretical protocols frame this

analysis. First, I approach *avtorskaia pesnia* as a deterritorialized milieu (A. Yurchak) par excellence. Yurchak developed his understanding of "deterritorialization" in close epistemological connection with Bakhtin's concept of *vnenakhodimost'* (translated usually as "outsideness" or "exotopy"), which has been re-articulated in Yurchak's writings in the form of the famous operative term *vnye* ('outside'). Yurchak's understanding is closely related to what American anthropologists depict as the "performative shift" which authoritative discourse experienced during late Soviet socialism.<sup>1</sup> According to Yurchak, the authoritative language after Stalin's death developed the ability to create the reality it names. This performative shift was accompanied by a decreasing ability of the same language to relate to the objective reality it names.<sup>2</sup> As a result, authoritative language inspired "new temporalities, spatialities, social relations, and meanings that were not necessarily anticipated or controlled by the state, although they were fully made possible by it".<sup>3</sup> New aesthetic paradigms, identities

1 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 134.

2 This refers to the "constative" function of language, cf. John L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, second edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

3 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 128.



and social interactions created, as Yurchak further elaborates, “a major *detrterritorialization* of late Soviet culture”<sup>4</sup>, which included a set of cultural and social practices that were operating *within* and yet *beyond* the hegemonic Soviet ideological discourse.

Secondly, I will do a close reading of the poetry of two prominent Russian bards, B. Okudzhava and V. Vysotskii. In doing so, I will pay special attention to one of the most authoritative ideological concepts of Soviet cultural and political history, which was often subject to mystification and glorifications of all kinds – that of “motherland” (*rodina*).

### *Avtorskaia pesnia*

During the last few decades, both in humanities and in social sciences, theoretical descriptions of Soviet culture very often use binary terms, such as repression and freedom, oppression and resistance, official and unofficial, state and society. At the same time, various popular cultural formations belonged to the “grey zone” of culture, situated between such dichotomies.<sup>5</sup> It was precisely these practices which reflected crucial paradoxes of late Soviet socialism and influenced the ways in which ideology was constructed, regulated and understood among Soviet citizens.

4 Ibid.

5 The “high policy” played an important role in the formation of this rather disorientated (and disorientating) cultural field. During late Soviet socialism political authorities dealing with censorship were rather lost. Very often it was not clear what belonged to the sphere of the forbidden and to the sphere of the allowed. This resulted in frequent absurdities, such as the fact that in the 1970s a large number of subversive bands played in dance parties organized by the Komsomol (cf. Alexei Yurchak, “Gagarin and the Rave Kids”, *Consuming Russia. Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele M. Barker, Duke University Press, 1999, p. 83). See also: Rachel Platonov, *Singing the Self: Guitar Poetry, Community, and Identity in the Post-Stalin Period*, Northwestern University Press, 2012, pp. 38-56.

In this essay, I understand *avtorskaia pesnia* as one of the most significant cultural formations of the time. Emerging from the “grey zone” of culture, it reflected trajectories of late Soviet socialism while actively preparing political and economic changes. Speaking with Bourdieu, this popular cultural practice operated as a “structuring structure”<sup>6</sup>, which means that it had an ability to do both – organize cultural practices and their perception.

*Avtorskaia pesnia* gained immense popularity during late Soviet socialism. Bards used forbidden ways of distribution (*magnitizdat*) and played their songs on guitar<sup>7</sup>, which was

6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 170.

7 In the practice of *avtorskaia pesnia* the guitar occupies a strong symbolic space. Therefore it is not surprising that many scholars refer to this genre as “guitar poetry” (see, for example, Rossen Djagajlov, “Guitar Poetry, Democratic Socialism, and the Limits of 1960s Internationalism”, *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 148-166). While in the time before Stalin’s death guitar bore conflicting meanings, symbolizing the negativity of bourgeois lifestyle, after his death it became a cult instrument for youth self-expression. It should, however, be emphasized that, apart from its reputation of being a “democratic” instrument, the Thaw saw the rise in its popularity for other, more practical reasons. One of them was availability: guitars were cheap, for example in 1964 a guitar costed only seven rubles. Also, parallel to economic growth and increase in purchasing power in the 1960s, the Soviets became increasingly interested in traveling and hiking. These leisure practices – with the guitar as a frequent fellow-traveller – were the symbol of a liberating and politically carefree way of life among the youth. The confirmation of its symbolic and associative relation with leisure can be found in Okudzhava’s poetry, where the guitar motif is most frequent in songs referring to an “empty” time (past or leisure, or holidays). For example, in a 1979 self-reflexive song *Chuvstvuiu, pora proshchat’sia* (I Feel, Here Comes the Time to Say Goodbye) the lyrical I of Okudzhava’s song invites friends to his home, for “dinner and guitar / and words of days long gone” (Bulat Okudzhava, *Stikhotvoreniia*, Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001, p. 264). The guitar was primarily associated with intimacy, private cultural practices taking place behind closed doors. For bards it carried a deep symbolic meaning – it was the absolute

not repressed, but out of favor with the party. People associated their songs not with labor, but with leisure activities, i.e. with “doing nothing” – hiking, camping, traveling<sup>8</sup>, or just sitting, drinking and smoking in a *khrushchevka* kitchen or in a communal apartment. The poetry of the two most prominent bards, Bulat Okudzhava (1924, Moscow – 1997, Paris) and Vladimir Vysotskii (1938, Moscow – 1980, Moscow), was rarely published in its original form. Songs of Okudzhava were officially published as written, not sung poetry. As for Vysotskii, who was remarkably famous during his lifetime because of his acting career

object of the poet’s devotion, as well as the symbol of his artistic freedom and autonomy, which is also the theme of one of Vysotskii’s most well-known songs, *Serebriannye struny* (Silver Strings) from 1962. 8 From the point of view of “high policy” of the time, traveling was to a certain extent problematic. On the one hand, weekends spent outside and organized leisure practices witnessed to the fact that the Soviet Union, like other countries, went through deep economic changes. On the other hand, these practices were marked by what culturologist P. Corrigan describes as “doing nothing”. The subversive potential of this seemingly passive social behavior is obvious. Although “doing nothing” seems as an endless waste of time, an absence of purpose, it is, in fact, “full of incident, constantly informed by ‘weird ideas’” (Paul Corrigan, “Doing Nothing”, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, second edition, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 84-87). Therefore, it is not surprising that “simple” walking was the most popular activity, along with camping, hiking, alpinism and speleology, because it obscured the fact that it was an end in itself. A witness of the period, quoted in A. Yurchak’s book, points out that archaeological expeditions did not have much to do with archaeology, but with fostering the culture of independent thinking: “It was very important on these expeditions... that everyone developed in his own direction and no one stood in the way of another’s thinking and feeling in his own way. That was very important... It was like meditation” (Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 138). According to Yurchak, the metaphor of meditation “captures well the experience of living in deterritorialized worlds of friendship, poetry, and never-ending discussions in the contexts of nature, bonfires, and hiking. The practice of meditation also stands for a particular relationship to the world – one stays acutely present in the world and yet uninvolved in its concerns, which is synonymous with the relationship of being *vnye*” (ibid.).

(which includes a highly praised performance of Hamlet), the first official recordings of his songs from the movie *Vertikal* were published in 1966. But almost none of Vysotskii’s songs were released by the state-owned recording label *Melodiia*, and only one song (*Iz dorozhnogo dnevnika – From a Traveller’s Diary*) was published in printed form through official channels, after harsh censorship. Okudzhava’s and Vysotskii’s poetry circulated the country in the form of privately-made copies. Their content and form did not follow the axioms of socialist realism, which – after Khrushchev’s famous speech at the twentieth party congress in 1956 – lost some of its discursive power, but was not abandoned in practice until the second half of the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Okudzhava’s work at *Literaturnaia gazeta* was compromised by phone calls by authorities, who were “surprised to have a guitar player working at the poetry section”<sup>10</sup>. Okudzhava’s poetry was discredited as naive, anti-patriotic, pessimistic, and pacifistic.<sup>11</sup> Vysotskii, by contrast, was “the star of the underground showbusiness”<sup>12</sup>. His poetry was part of an unofficial artistic stream in his career. Official acknowledgements of his poetical activities came only posthumously.

In this essay I argue that the popularity of Okudzhava and Vysotskii, as well as of the genre of *avtorskaia pesnia*, was directly

9 M. Epstein refers to the period after Stalin’s death as “socialist sentimentalism”. Mikhail Epstein, “After the Future: On the New Consciousness in Literature”, *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika*, eds. Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993, pp. 257-287.

10 Alexandr Gorodnitskii, “... Nam ne khvatalo Okudzhavy”, *Golos nadezhdy*, Vyp. 2, Moskva: Bulat, 2005, p. 78.

11 Andrei Krylov, “Vspomnim ikh poimenno”, *Golos nadezhdy*, Vyp. 2, Moskva: Bulat, 2005, pp. 237-284.

12 Maxim Kravchinskii, *Russkaia pesnia v izgnanii: Khudozhestvennoe oformlenie*, Nizhnii Novgorod: DEKOM, 2007, p. 9.

connected to the fact that they did not take – in their poetry and in their personal lifestyles – a clear and decisive political stand.<sup>13</sup> By considering themselves anti-Stalinist, but neither anti-Soviet nor pro-Soviet, they reflected and incorporated the lifestyle that A. Yurchak describes as “living *vnye*”.<sup>14</sup> Further on, I argue that the prevailing characterization of *avtorskaia pesnia* as the sung poetry of “the loyal opposition”<sup>15</sup> is not accurate.<sup>16</sup> As a

13 The question of the level of oppositionality, that is inscribed in *avtorskaia pesnia*, is nowadays still vital among the genre’s historians. J. M. Daughtry emphasizes that “unofficial, grassroots recordings such as these – known popularly as *magnitizdat* – generate ambivalence on the part of Soviet authorities, who treat them at times as a benign by-product of amateur artistic activity, at times as a pernicious attempt to circumvent the state’s monopoly on the mediation of cultural production” (J. Martin Daughtry, “Sonic Samizdat: Situating Unofficial Recording in the Post-Stalinist Soviet Union”, *Poetics Today* 30:1, Spring 2009, p. 28). In his book *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet Mass Song* (1984), Gerald S. Smith emphasizes that many bards, and Okudzhava and Vysotskii respectively, “stayed by and large within the tolerated limits of [...] the middle ground between what is actively promoted and what is actively persecuted by the authorities” (cf. Platonov, *Singing the Self*, p. 6). R. Djagalov writes that “guitar poetry enjoyed a liminal, semiofficial status, never particularly liked by Soviet bloc cultural bureaucracies for the uncontrollable public sphere it fostered and the near-impossibility of censoring highly improvised, oral performances but not explicitly forbidden either” (Djagalov, “Guitar Poetry, Democratic Socialism”, p. 155).

14 Living *vnye*, according to A. Yurchak, refers to the refusal of an individual to take a clear political stand. It includes the position of being uninterested, and is applied to those who “considered themselves neither anti-Soviet nor pro-Soviet but non-Soviet (*asovetskie*), uninterested in political and ideological topics” (Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 138).

15 Namely, even the Soviet emigration of the time criticized their poetry on account of their “singing songs about Van’ka Morozov or the little blue ball” (Gorodnitskii, “... Nam ne khvatilo Okudzhavy”, p. 79) instead of offering a harsh, explicit and decisive criticism of Soviet authorities. Some authors claim that Okudzhava’s and Vysotskii’s poetry, unlike the poetry of A. Galich, was not dominated by political oppositionality but rather a symbolic one – at best (Ol’ga Shilina, “Chelovek v poeticheskome mire Vladimira Vysotskogo”, *Mir Vysotskogo*, Vyp. III/2, Moskva: GKCM V. S. Vysotskogo, 1999, p. 38).

16 This image of *avtorskaia pesnia* was predominantly shaped in Russian scholarship, see for ex-

ample Argus (M. K. Zhelezov), “Zoshchenko v stikhakh”, *Mir Vysotskogo*, Vyp. III/1, Moskva: GKCM V. S. Vysotskogo, 1968, p. 320; Vladimir G. Dagurov, “Odn poet na svete zhil”, *Golos nadezhdy*, Vyp. 3, Moskva: Bulat, 2006, p. 23; Liudmila L. Ivanova, “Istoria i pustota. K voprosu o postmodernizme”, *Mir Vysotskogo*, Vyp. V., eds. Andrei Krylov and Valentina Shcherbakova, Moskva: GKCM V. S. Vysotskogo, 2001, p. 282; Andrei Krylov, “O zadachakh i osobennostiakh tekstologii poeticheskikh proizvedenii Okudzhavy: K postanovke problema”, *Okudzhava: Problemy poetiki i tekstologii*, ed. Andrei Krylov, Moskva: GKCM V. S. Vysotskogo, 2002, p. 187; Mark Tsybul’skii, *Planeta Vladimir Vysotskii*, Moskva: Eksmo, 2008, p. 501.

17 Platonov, *Singing the Self: Guitar Poetry*, p. 4.; see also Adele M. Barker, “The Culture Factory”, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele M. Barker, London: Duke University Press, 1999, pp. 20-21.

18 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 139.

authoritative regime that made *avtorskaia pesnia* possible. Most bards, including Okudzhava and Vysotskii, were never imprisoned or exiled. M. Daughtry even emphasized that the tapes of *avtorskaia pesnia* were submitted "to the customs officers for review [...] before the officers emerged, smiling, to return the tapes and approve their export".<sup>19</sup> The popularity of Vysotskii "with state officials was unmatched"<sup>20</sup>, and by the end of the 1960s, there were strong institutional ties between the bard movement in the Moscow Amateur Song Club (*Klub samodeiatel'noi pesni*) and the Komsomol.<sup>21</sup> In fact, it could be argued that it was the system itself that enabled the phenomenon of *avtorskaia pesnia* to gain popularity.<sup>22</sup> Outside the Soviet state project this cultural practice would presumably have lost its social significance and ultimately made no sense. Okudzhava even explicitly complained that *avtorskaia pesnia* lost its credibility and meaning, and became a form of mass culture, i.e. 'estrada', as soon as it became officially approved.<sup>23</sup> A. Krylov therefore rightly claims that "the genre would never have achieved its cultural centrality without

official censorship"<sup>24</sup>, and that "censorship's disappearance in the late 1980s robbed the genre of the advantage it enjoyed over print culture and ironically doomed it".<sup>25</sup>

Recalling the famous analogy between postmodernism and the cultural logic of late capitalism by F. Jameson, Yurchak describes late Soviet socialism in terms of the "double-sided cultural logic of the Soviet universe".<sup>26</sup> "The absence of any political attitude, either pro-official or anti-official, was a way of avoiding official meanings, of existing within them – and even pretending to support them – without needing to think about them."<sup>27</sup> Yurchak gives an apt example where listening to Vysotskii's sung poetry reverberates this particular lifestyle:

*At the moment Lena mentioned Vysotskii to her editor, a mutual recognition of svoi occurred. They both liked Vysotskii, and although both also wrote formulaic texts, they were not completely cynical about the socialist ideals and ethics, and regularly had to attend Komsomol and party meetings.*

*The editor looked at me thoughtfully and asked:*

*"Does your friend like Vysotskii?"*

*"Yes, I think so."*

*"And what about you?"*

*"I could also say that I do."*

*He was quiet for a moment and then said: "OK, I need to go to the party committee. In the meantime, you may listen to this."*

*He turned on the tape recorder. It was Vysotskii.*

*He added: "When you get tired of it you can turn it off."*

*How can I GET TIRED OF VYSOTSKII?!?*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Daughtry, "Sonic Samizdat", p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Unofficial culture (or, as in the case of *avtorskaia pesnia*, semi-forbidden culture, cf. Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 116) depended on its ability to manipulate official channels. An illustrative example is the phenomenon of *magnitizdat*, since magnetic tape recorders were manufactured in state-owned factories and sold in state-owned stores, while the state also determined the price of magnetic tape recorders. Also, it should be mentioned that the ambivalent, and often weak and unsophisticated subversive capacity of the texts of popular culture illustrates one of the key features of popular culture in general: What is to be resisted is present in the resistance to it, cf. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Dmitrii Suharev (ed.), *Avtorskaia pesnia: Antologiya*, Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoria, 2002, p. 455.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Djalalov, "Guitar Poetry, Democratic Socialism", p. 155.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids", p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 123.



This example illustrates the gap between the private life of an average Soviet citizen and its public representation. Even if the citizens publicly approved of many ideas of socialism, they participated in socialist practices rather by default, without contemplating their symbolic meaning. They “inserted” socialist practices between actions they were really interested in doing, frequently in a subversive way.

Extra-textual characteristics of *avtorskaia pesnia*, concerning its production and consumption (aspects which are well known and already researched thoroughly) as well as intra-textual characteristics (that I will address in the second part of this essay) make these songs a paradigmatic example of a cultural practice that was “in peculiar relationship to the authoritative regime – they were ‘suspended’ simultaneously inside and outside of it, occupying the border zones between here and elsewhere”<sup>29</sup>. In order to elaborate this argument and to illustrate how the *vnye* lifestyle was structured, operated, and maintained, I will do a close reading of the “motherland” discourse in the poetry of the two bards.

### “Motherland”

The discourse of the “motherland” went through different stages during Soviet history. It became more defined in 1934,<sup>30</sup> after the

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> In his text *Arkhetipy sovetskoi kul'tury* (The Archetypes of Soviet Culture) H. Günther writes that it is the year 1934, the year of the First Session of Soviet Writers where M. Gorkii presented his famous paper *O sotsialisticheskom realizme* (On Socialist Realism), that saw the appearance of the female/feminine/maternal principle in the archetypal scheme of the Soviet myth. This principle, which found its most intense expression in the cult of the Homeland and the soil, is closely related to the changes of the Soviet myth, which, according to H. Günther, should be viewed as the core which generated but also maintained the Soviet culture in

beginning of socialist realism, and peaked in the poetry written during the Second World War and its aftermath.<sup>31</sup> During Thaw and Stagnation, “motherland” represented the marginal contents of the weakening state culture. These developments are more or less clearly reflected in Okudzhava’s and Vysotskii’s poetry.

The key framework of the “motherland” concept is the female, the maternal. In the Soviet period, when the role of the Great Father was attributed to Stalin, the patron of general welfare<sup>32</sup>, the female archetype was limited to the mother aspect, where the mother, like the mother of the wet soil (*mat' syra zemlia*), has the ability of self-impregnation. Mass song (*massovaia pesnia*), the representative genre of socialist realism in art, and one of the most important propagandistic expressions of “homo sovieticus” as an ideal form of

its official form. While in the 1920s, with fresh memories of the October Revolution, the Soviet myth assumed a horizontal direction, grouping around the ideal of egalitarian brotherhood (the idea of fraternalism), the late 1920s and early 1930s saw the emergence of the figures of an older brother and wise, authoritative father (the idea of paternalism). This is the period when the Soviet myth assumed a vertical (hierarchical) direction, which implied the tendency of “ascent” from the concrete to the abstract, from action to idea, from the individual to the collective, in a word: from the low (concrete, real) to the high (ideal, symbolic) level. The horizontal distribution of the Soviet myth develops into the “complete triangle of the Great Family”, cf. Hans Günther, “Arkhetipy sovetskoi kul'tury”, *Socrealisticheskii kanon*, eds. Hans Günther and Evgeny Dobrenko, Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000, pp. 743-784. The wise father is at its top, and with the replacement of the linear with the vertical, hierarchical idea, the brothers turned into (heroic) sons and daughters. Since the sons and daughters needed the mother, and the father needed the wife, the image of a Motherland embodied the archetype of the female sex.

<sup>31</sup> See also: Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Poster under Lenin and Stalin*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996 (Introduction and Chapters Two and Three).

<sup>32</sup> Samarin in: Günther, “Arkhetipy sovetskoi kul'tury”, p. 765.

Soviet political subjectivity, conceived of the “motherland” as follows:

1. The “motherland” is seen as a place that constantly renews its energy (light and warmth). The energy originates in Moscow, or in the Kremlin, and thanks to the strength of the source, the light and warmth reach Siberia, the outer border of the “motherland”. Along the vast stretch from the centre to the frontier there are also other sources of energy. The “motherland” represents the synergy of all these sources, constantly renewing its energy potential (like a star or the sun). Due to the fact that it revolves around motives of source, origin and development, this specific discourse of the “motherland” can be termed “cosmogonical”.

2. In this discourse, the most characteristic symbolic ornament, representing the “motherland” chronotope, is the circle. Apart from the fact that it symbolizes perfection, it also signifies the femininity of the concept.

3. In this kind of poetry, there are only two types of subjects (“I” and “we”), and both of them express their affirmative relationship with the “motherland”. Both subjects are impersonal, but presumably masculine. The love of the (masculine) subject towards the (feminine) object is asexual and protective (resembling the relationship between a son and his mother) and primarily moral. Loving the “motherland” is a matter of collective, as well as individual duty.<sup>33</sup>

33 These conclusions are based on my readings of numerous popular mass songs of the time (1920s–early 1950s), such as *Pesnia o Rodine* (Song About “Motherland”), *Marsh veselykh rebiat* (March Of the Cheerful Children), *My Rodinu slavim trudom* (We Celebrate “Motherland” With Labour), *Pesnia o Volge* (Song About Volga) by V. Lebedev-Kumach, *Vernulsia ia na Rodinu* (I’ve Returned to “Motherland”) by M. Matusovsky, *Rodina* (“Motherland”) by D. Altauzen, *Letiat pereletnye pticy* (Migrant Birds Fly) by M. Isakovskiy, *Daleko ot doma* (Far From Home) by H. Labkovskiy, *Toska po Rodine* (Yearning For the “Motherland”) by E. Dolmatovskiy, *Kreml’ noch’iu*

Such a discourse of the “motherland” is not only characteristic of the “golden age” of socialist realism (from 1934 till 1953). The stereotypes of the “motherland” are also echoed in the cultures of the Thaw and Stagnation (until the early 1980s), especially in the works of writers and poets whose art offered an aesthetical revision of socialist ideas in the spirit of Leninism.<sup>34</sup>

### Okudzhava’s Arbat

Okudzhava “gave birth” to the bard movement – a movement of “singers of guitar poetry who would forever elude official control, and whose intimate songs distributed by modern tape technology opened a space for free discourse in Soviet society”.<sup>35</sup> Okudzhava’s *avtorskaia pesnia* – like the one written by other poets – has a distinctive urban quality. In his texts, Moscow carries a strong symbolism, resembling the stereotype of “motherland” in mass poetry. However, Okudzhava’s lyrical subject uses Moscow to express feelings opposite to those emanating from mass poetry: the sense of lack, of not-having, of radical emptiness, loss and disappointment. The Kremlin is associated with darkness, while the author’s focus lies on the iconic (but

(Kremlin by Night) by S. Vasil’ev and many others. More in: Danijela Lugarić Vukas, *Ruski bard. Modusi popularnog u poeziji Bulata Okudžave i Vladimira Vysockog* (Russian Bards: Popular Aspects in the Author’s Song of Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotskii), Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2011, pp. 161–248. Valuable insights, many of whom inspired my analysis as well, are offered in: Irina Sandomirskaia, “Kniga o Rodine. Opyt analiza diskursivnykh praktik”, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, Sonderband 50, 2001.

34 See: Mikha Javornik, “Ekologija teksta in ruska kultura 20. stoletja”, *Primerjalna književnost*, vol. 30, issue 1, 2007, p. 63.

35 James von Geldern, “1961. Bulat Okudzhava”, *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, <http://www.soviet-history.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1961okudzhava&Year=1961>, accessed 31 August 2017.

– in spatial terms – marginal) Arbat street. For Okudzhava the Arbat represents a “garden of Eden”, a “motherland in miniature”, a microcosm, a “genetic motherland” and the most valuable source of creative inspiration. In his song *Rechitativ* (Recitative), which belongs to the so-called “Arbat cycle”, the Arbat is represented as a unique and modest private space (the Arbat courtyard) existing exclusively in the poet’s memory. This space, originating from the personal memory of the poet, becomes a ‘*lieu de mémoire*’ in Pierre Nora’s understanding, i.e. an “entity [...], which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community”<sup>36</sup>. Autobiographical details (a private courtyard, planted birches) are intertwined with elements of collective cultural memory (Homer, of whom there are no traces, and Glazkov, who lived across the street):

Тот самый двор, где я сажал березы,  
был создан по законам вечной прозы  
и образом дворов арбатских слыл:  
там, правда, не выращивались розы,  
да и Гомер туда не заходил...  
Зато поэт Глазков напротив жил [...]<sup>37</sup>

In his famous *Pesenka o moskovskom murav’e* (Poem of the Moscow Ant), the poet contrasts the great city of Moscow with the lyrical subject – a tiny ant. What is highlighted are not the political or otherwise significant parts

of the city, but rather its empty, disorientating “winding streets”. Even though the city carries the “higher rank and name of Moscow”, the lyrical subject perceives it as warm. The interaction between the lyrical subject and the city effectively deconstructs the idea of Soviet and Stalinist culture that a man, being a part of a collective “we”, was the image and mimicry of his (political and ideological) environment. In Okudzhava’s song the reader encounters a different logical direction. In the last verse the lyrical “I” states: “Ах, этот город, он такой, похожий на меня” (“Ah, that city, it is like me”).<sup>38</sup> In this case, the city is represented as the image of the ant(i)-subject, rather than vice versa. This turns Arbat into a metaphor that grasps trajectories of political and cultural transition in a profoundly attainable, popular way. In the song *Arbatskii dvor* (Arbat Courtyard, 1959) the city topos is referred to in a similar way. Accordingly, the city loses the aspect of physical and geographical vastness and becomes a humane space, a stage of private and ideologically insignificant lives. In *Pesenka ob Arbate* (The Poem of Arbat, 1959), the famous central song of the cycle, the Arbat is compared to a clear and transparent river (the Russian word *prozrachnyi* means glowing, gentle, but also clear, easy to understand). The Arbat becomes – just like a river – a site in motion, movable and difficult to grasp. It becomes a symbol of the irreversible passage of time, of loss and forgetting, and finally an infinite spiritual space of self-reflexivity, an unlimited source of creative inspiration.

Despite the heterogeneity of symbolism in Okudzhava’s poetry, Moscow’s Arbat never represents the canonical “motherland”. On the contrary, Arbat is a space where big words and big ideas are avoided. Apart

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Nora, *Preface to the English-language edition. From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory*, [http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan\\_of\\_Arc/OLR/03\\_PierreNora\\_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan_of_Arc/OLR/03_PierreNora_LieuxdeMemoire.pdf), p. xvii, accessed 31 August 2017.

<sup>37</sup> “That same yard where I planted birch, / was established by the laws of eternal prose / and by the sample of Arbat yards: / there, however, roses did not grow, / and Homer did not go there... / But the poet Glazkov lived opposite.” (Translated by D. Lugarić Vukas.) Okudzhava, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 239.

<sup>38</sup> Okudzhava, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 47.

from its smallness, its key attributes are urbanity, humanity, intimacy and sexual neutrality, but also motion and change. What is more important, it does not possess the ability to expand like the big Soviet "motherland", neither in the geographical, nor in the temporal sense. Okudzhava's Arbat has no future, it rather resonates a certain past. Unlike the Soviet "motherland", it is not the projection of an ideal future, but the product of memory, reflection and nostalgia. Being turned towards the past, transience is Arbat's significant property. Unlike the monolithic and resistant image of the Great Motherland, the imagological construct of the Arbat is volatile – just like the sentimental "old-school romantic" subject who sings about it.

### Vysotskii's liminal zones

One of the characteristics of Vysotskii's poetry is its liminal quality, its duality: he frequently plays with symbolic borders between high and low, stereotypical and original, artistic and everyday, et cetera. In his song *My bditel'ny – my tain ne razboltaem* (We Are Careful – We Will Not Blurt Out Secrets, 1978), topics like the racial discontent in the USA, Yasser Arafat's health and the politico-economic situation in China which are taken extremely seriously by a devout Soviet citizen, are intertwined with everyday activities, such as bathing a child and watching a hockey match. This – often grotesque – duality, as described by the Slovenian scholar M. Javornik,<sup>39</sup> is characteristic of Vysotskii's poetry in general. However, unlike Okudzhava, for whom Arbat represents a bridge to the "other" world, the world beyond the "objective" reality, Vysotskii purposefully stays *within* the (authoritative)

39 Javornik, "Ekologija teksta in ruska kultura 20. stoletja", p. 63.

language and within the world view of mass consciousness. His lyrical "I" does not speak *about* "a devout Soviet citizen", it rather is this Soviet citizen. As the poem unfolds, images of mass consciousness are disrupted by poetic devices such as catachresis. They are also degraded as the authoritative discourse and Soviet iconography are reduced to mere performativity. Vysotskii acts as a "hero" (object) and at the same time as "the author" (subject) of the authoritative discourse. This intertwined relation between subject and object illustrates the process of deterritorializing Soviet life from within. It bestows new meanings to the authoritative script that a poet uses and simultaneously *abuses*.

Moreover, unlike Okudzhava's poetical discourse, which can be termed centripetal in the context of its logic (all elements and aspects of the discourse are drawn by the central "little motherland" of the Arbat into a single structure), Vysotskii represents and articulates the motifs of his poetry in terms of greatness, expansion, even hyperbole. In this sense, his discourse can be termed centrifugal. It is hence no surprise that traveling is one of the central themes of Vysotskii's poetry.<sup>40</sup> It is also one of his most interesting ways to subvert canonized principles. Unlike Soviet mass poetry, which tolerated only one reason for leaving the native land (going to war), and unlike Okudzhava's poetry of space and stasis Vysotskii's songs can be viewed as poetry in motion, as poetry of non-rootedness. With his oeuvre containing references to 67 Soviet and 56 foreign cities,<sup>41</sup> the number of geographical

40 See also: Danijela Lugarić Vukas, "Aspekti nomadizma u stvaralaštvu V. Vysockog" (Aspects of Nomadism in Poetry of V. Vysotskii), *Nomadizam (Nomadism)*, ed. Jasmina Vojvodić, Zagreb: Disput, 2015, pp. 205-218.

41 Sergei I. Kormilov, "Goroda v poezii V. S. Vy-



toponyms in his songs makes Vysotskii unique among Russian writers. It is worth pointing out that the poet travels both horizontally and vertically in his songs. Vertical traveling does not necessarily imply going upwards, but downwards as well, and it is interesting to see that it is especially in moments of precipitation, falling or entering the hypothetical gate of the earth and the subterranean, that the stereotype of the Soviet “motherland” seems to be partially rehabilitated. For example, in his song *V den', kogda my, podderzhkoi zemli...* (When We Will, Supported By The Soil..., 1973) we encounter the comparison between the earth and the “faithful bride” or between the sea and the “mother of unruly children”:

[...] *А когда из другой, непохожей весны  
Мы к родному причалу придем прямоком, –  
Растворятся морские ворота страны  
Перед каждым своим моряком.*

*В море – водная гладь, да еще – благодать!  
И вестей – никаких, сколько нам ни пиши...  
Оттого морякам тяжело привыкать  
Засыпать после качки в уютной тиши.*

*И опять уплываем, с землей обручась –  
С этой самую верной невестой своей, –  
Чтоб вернуться в назначенный час,  
Как бы там ни баюкало нас  
Море – мать непутевых детей. [...]*<sup>42</sup>

sotskogo”, *Mir Vysotskogo*, Vyp. VI, Moskva: GKCM V. S. Vysotskogo, 2002, pp. 234-272.

42 “[...] When we come from a foreign, unusual spring / And we near the Motherland’s wonderful shores, / Then all gates will the country wide open swing / To embrace every seaman of hers! // Velvet water is stretched, so soothed, so smoothed, / To the outer world there aren’t any threads... / Coming back sailors find it too hard to get used / To the comfort of home and cozy beds.” (Translated by George Tokarev [2002, <http://www.wysotsky.com/1033.htm?581>, accessed 3 September 2017]); *Vysotskii, Sochinenia v dvukh tomakh*, Ekaterinburg: Y-Faktoria, 1997, Tom 1, p. 445.

In this song, the hegemonic representation of “motherland” is reminiscent. However, Vysotskii’s intervention is obvious: The voices of his unruly children, resembling the “happy children” from the Soviet mass song *Marsh veselykh rebiat* (March Of the Cheerful Children), do not originate from the solid body of the disciplined Soviet “motherland”, but from the body of an unstable and precarious sea, symbolizing hostile and dangerous spaces, or even life in all its hardship and uneasiness. Further on, by introducing the motive of an engagement between the sailor and the earth – the “most faithful bride” – the poet does not reach for the motive of the Soviet “motherland”, but instead refers to a different popular cultural myth, that of the “unattainable bride Russia”<sup>43</sup>.

If the brilliant Soviet “motherland” served for Soviet poets as an ideal metaphor for the true mother of the Soviet state in its futurity, if the Moscow Arbat served Okudzhava as an ideal metaphor for the “little motherland” of a “little hero” in his past-ness, it is travel – physical and mental – that served Vysotskii as an ideal form to articulate that the Soviet “motherland” is reduced to its performativeness. Since the poet’s favorite place of devotion does not exist as a stable and geographically delimited site, but rather as elusive, the image of “motherland” in his poetry exists only hypothetically, as a non-place that can be epitomized by the following formula: “Навсегда и никуда – / Вечное стремление” (Forever and nowhere – / Eternal striving)<sup>44</sup>.

The non-existence of the authoritative cultural signifier of the “motherland” in Vysotskii’s

43 Ellen Rutten, *Unattainable Bride Russia: Gendering Nation, State, and Intelligentsia in Russian Intellectual Culture*, Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 2010.

44 Vysotskii, *Sochinenia v dvukh tomakh*, Tom 1, p. 236.

poetry illustrates a “performative shift of authoritative discourse” during late socialism, leading to a situation where “the meanings of authoritative symbols, acts, and rituals were not supposed to be read literally, as constative statements. Therefore discussing them made no sense and was considered a mistake and a waste of time”.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the Soviet mass poetry, which had anchored itself in the goodness of this world (Kremlin, Moscow, Volga, Siberia) pointing at the same time to the evil other world (on the other side of the border), and unlike Okudzhava for whom the Arbat represents a dislocated chronotope, the source of memory and creative inspiration, Vysotskii’s images of space resemble the chronotope of the threshold in Dostoevskii’s prose writings – the spaces “in-between”, such as staircases or nameless city streets. As M. Bakhtin argues, the fundamental quality of these chronotopes is that they signify “crisis and break in a life”<sup>46</sup>, which – in the context of Vysotskii’s poetry – eludes the “I” of the (broken) poet. The bond between the own and the foreign, essential for the image of the Soviet “motherland”, is irrelevant in the context of Vysotskii’s poetical images of space. While the fundamental feeling associated with the Soviet “motherland” was faith in the bright future, and with Okudzhava’s Arbat nostalgia, longing and wistfulness, the essential feeling associated with Vysotskii’s non-(mother)land-as-mental-travel is deep-seated inner restlessness and rootlessness.

### Conclusion

Given the popularity of the authoritative

concept of “motherland” throughout Russian and Soviet history, one could expect that Okudzhava’s and Vysotskii’s songs, which contain so many details of Soviet everyday life and often openly speak to (and about) collective consciousness, would reflect – at least to a certain degree – that influential and powerful stereotype. However, the canonical, hegemonic version of the “motherland” almost completely disappeared from Okudzhava’s and Vysotskii’s poetry. Instead, Okudzhava articulates the idea of the “little motherland” signifying smallness, finiteness, pastness and gender neutrality. In Vysotskii’s poetry, the representation of the stereotype of the “motherland” is deeply interlaced with the polyphonic foundations of his poetry. The variety of possible subjects in his poems, the “heroes in roles” (*rolevoi geroi*), undermines the exclusiveness, homogeneity of a masculine impersonal “I” or “we” that expresses the “motherland” in Soviet mass songs. Like in other contexts of his poetry, the image of “motherland” is referred to so rarely that it can be analytically discussed in solely hypothetical terms. Reduced to mere performativity, this powerful image is unmasked as emptiness, as pure “nothingness”. The ideal ornament of the Soviet “motherland”, the circle, is broken and turned into a curve, a voyage crossing borders and overcoming the binary opposition between the own and the foreign, an essential distinction for the discourse of “motherland”. This leads to an image of a borderline non-(mother)land, a “motherland” as a perpetually liminal space, which is international, belonging to everyone and no one simultaneously.

The analysis allows me to draw two conclusions. By not harshly and overtly criticising the Soviet authoritative discourse, Russian bards including Okudzhava and

<sup>45</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist; transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 248.

Vysotskii do not express their faithfulness to the system, but rather mirror their indifference towards it. Their poetry is not inherently oppositional, but rather apolitical. Secondly, the cultural field of the late Soviet socialism was not homogenous. A comparative analysis of the ways the two bards treat the concept of the “motherland” reveals that indifference towards the Soviet authoritative ideological and political discourse intensified during Stagnation. That intensification remained inscribed in Vysotskii’s poetry in a profoundly sophisticated way: not with what has been said, but with what the poet has chosen to remain silence about.<sup>47</sup>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Soviet Port Cities and Consumerism in the 1970s and '80s

by Irina Mukhina

## Abstract

Being close to the west did not necessarily result in a westernization of Soviet identities. The case of Soviet port cities illustrates that during the 1970s and 80s, close intercultural contact and easy access to western goods sharpened people's critical view about the west, and the quality and usefulness of its products for Soviet everyday life.

**Key words:** consumerism, port cities, black market, fashion, identity, intercultural contacts.

In 1983, Konstantin Chernenko gave a speech about the "political naiveté" of Soviet youth who fall prey to enemies' attempts "to exploit the specific features of youth psychology for its own ends." Predictably, he referred to the western popular culture, and especially music, that he believed was "corrupting" the young minds of the communist state. Chernenko called on the youth to develop "a strong immunity" to western fashions, and he despaired over how much of this bourgeois culture was already circulating in the Soviet Union. The call was primarily aimed at the *Komsomol*-aged youth of the capital cities who were deemed especially vulnerable to this corrupting influence of the West.<sup>1</sup>

The culturally dominant cities of the Soviet Union were indeed important to the consumption of western pop culture.<sup>2</sup> Yet these capital cities were also unlike many smaller towns for at least two reasons: the residents of the former were more exposed

to foreign tourists and journalists than anywhere else in the country, and most of the Soviet trade representatives, diplomatic corps, and international journalists were recruited from among Muscovites or resided in Moscow. Thus, any location other than a large city might reveal alternative patterns of Soviet consumption and people's exposure to western products, and the study of Soviet consumerism needs to consider simultaneously the diversity of consumer nightmares and consumer utopias that existed across the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Novorossiysk, a case study for this project, demonstrates such a

3 The terminology of consumer utopias is derived from Kate Brown's study of Soviet "gated communities" (closed cities with residents working for the top-secret military industries). Brown argues that "these communities were so attractive – such consumer utopias, in fact – that residents gave up important rights and freedoms in order to live in them" (p. 50). There was no shortage or deficit of anything in these places, and they were a substantial rather than a marginal phenomenon in the narrative of Soviet consumption. Kate Brown, "Utopia Gone Terribly Right: Plutonium's 'Gated Communities' in the Soviet Union and United States," *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Naurburger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 49-67. In contrast, Ekaterina Emeliantseva, writing about a different closed city of Severodvinsk, concluded that regarding "consumer goods such as clothing or furniture, the situation was not much better [in Severodvinsk] than everywhere else." See Ekaterina Emeliantseva, "The Privilege of Seclusion: Consumption Strategies in the Closed City of Severodvinsk," *Ab Imperio* 2, 2011, pp. 238-259, here p. 257.

1 The protocol of the June 1983 Central Committee meeting on ideology, as published in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 9 July 1983.

2 See, for example, Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994; Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counter-culture in Russia*, New York: State University of New York, 1995; Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed*, London: Routledge, 1994, Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until It was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.



departure from the mainstream narrative. Its residents indeed craved western goods and appreciated them, and they had relatively easy access to them in this small Soviet consumer utopia. Partially for this reason, the residents' understanding of western fashions and styles and the choices that they made in acquiring them were distinct from their counterparts in capital cities.<sup>4</sup>

Based on extensive oral history fieldwork and research in various port administration archives, my study investigates the role of port cities in the Soviet Union as magnets of change and cultured spaces shaped by cosmopolitanism and consumption. It demonstrates that Soviet consumers of the 1970s were far from unfortunate victims of massive shortages. Even if expensive, western clothing and styles were available to most residents of capital cities and port towns, thus shaping their tastes, their sense of style, and their personal aspirations. Specifically, the ports of Novorossiysk, Batumi and others created perfect loopholes through which material objects passed in surprisingly substantial numbers. Sailors brought enough foreign clothing to meet the needs of those port town residents who could afford it on the black market. People employed by port authorities and those who bought foreign goods exemplified the lifestyle and outlooks that many beyond the boundaries of these port towns aspired to achieve.<sup>5</sup>

This influx of goods played an important role in shaping popular attitude to consumption. In the Soviet Union, the consumption of foreign-

made goods – any goods that were labeled as made in places other than the USSR – was deeply “sacramental” in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s. That is, these objects symbolically represented the west and its values of consumerism and style. Moreover, though it is beyond the purpose and the scope of my work to prove or disprove any direct links between the consumption of western culture and goods and the demise of the Soviet system, western goods were often presented as symbols of rebellion against the system, and they were coveted for this reason. In just a few examples among many, Olga Gurova asserts that underwear was a battlefield between the state and the man; Susan Reid writes that “consumption choices could, and did, articulate resistance”; and Ekaterina Emeliantseva acknowledges that in the existing scholarship the vision of the consumption of western culture as subversive or opposing the regime is dominant, if not mainstream.<sup>6</sup>

Partially, the material objects that were integral to this sacramental consumption were dispersed through capital cities' channels. But many of them entered by means of imperfectly controlled port towns' border crossings, and sailors in particular were important players in channeling the goods. Yet ironically, precisely because of the greater-than-average availability of foreign goods, especially clothing, the port town residents became non-sacramental consumers and shifted away from the patterns of “the center.” While no precise date for the change can be

4 The project relies heavily on interviews (oral history) and utilizes local archives and newspapers as well.

5 The Ministry of the Merchant Marine (Morflot) as well as the Shipbuilding Ministry of the Soviet Union employed thousands of workers; some sailed abroad and many more did not, but a job in Morflot made foreign goods more readily available for all.

6 See, for example, Olga Gurova, *Soviet Underwear: Between Ideology and Everyday Life / Sovetskoe nizhnee bel'e: mezhdru ideologii i povsednevnost'iu*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008; *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, eds. Susan E. Reid, David Crowley, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000; Ekaterina Emeliantseva, “The Privilege of Seclusion: Consumption Strategies in the Closed City of Severodvinsk,” pp. 238-259.

identified, by the early 1980s people came to have relatively little concern for the intrinsic meanings of the goods. As a matter of fact, the analysis of interviews of sellers and buyers in Novorossiysk demonstrated no direct correlation between consumption of “made in” clothing and interest in western pop culture, i.e. those who craved jeans did not necessarily want to listen to *The Beatles* (or even knew of them!). For port town residents at large, the craving for particular western attire was not necessarily an act of admiration of western values; instead, it was a manifestation of their social status (whether real or self-proclaimed) and a sense of fashion that was deeply embedded into realities of their daily lives. As such, much like their western counterparts, my respondents wanted better, more beautiful, and more reliable products that met their sense of fashion, style, and taste.<sup>7</sup>

The port towns saw an abundant, even if clandestine, supply of foreign clothing that was transported by the workers of Soviet cargo fleet; indeed, it was a well-established and clearly recognized reality of life. The sailors who went to *zagranka* (abroad) were a privileged group by all means. In port towns in particular, nearly all young men aspired to such a career, and nearly all young women hoped to marry a sailor (even though most ships left home for six months at a time). This profession presented a unique opportunity in the Soviet Union to see the world and experience other cultures. But this idyllic opportunity for encountering exotic places was always closely intertwined with more

mundane and practical reasons for joining the crew. Sailors found nothing dichotomous or incompatible in this, and remarkably, contrary to all others who sold foreign goods, such profits or activities did not diminish the sailors’ romantic (even if idealized) reputation for masculinity, honor, and success. “I’d truly seen the world,” one sailor recalled. “We went from the Black Sea through Dardanelles into the Mediterranean to the ports of Egypt, Syria, Yugoslavia (near Dubrovnik), and from there we took off across the Atlantic to the Caribbean, to Cuba.” This sailor added that “seeing the world and making a profit was important,” and he made a profit not only on clothing (very few could buy much because the wages were paid in *bonny*, or cash-equivalent coupons that could be used in specialized stores in the Soviet Union) but other items as well. Sea shells, postcards, calendars, and plastic bags that he received virtually for free were popular among friends, and whatever was not given out as gifts could be sold for one to five rubles a piece.

The mechanism for this clandestine trade had its unwritten rules. Typically, there was a lot of camaraderie among the sailors, and the novices received advice on what to bring with them to various countries for exchange or resale. Peers eagerly shared their “contacts” abroad, and once a person joined the crew, the competition was minimal. Most sailors acknowledged that this was largely because the market was far greater on both sides of the encounter than what the sailors could possibly saturate. But there also existed a strict hierarchy of what and how much each and every person could bring. The hierarchy was based on the rank of the person, and the volume and value of goods was closely monitored. If a sailor overstepped a certain barrier and was perceived as greedy by his

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, a discussion of consumer revolution by Natalya Chernyshova, in “Consumer Revolution? Society and Economy in the Soviet 1970s,” presented at the *ASSEES Annual Convention*, 2010; also Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of The Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

peers, he almost always ended up “accidently” being discovered by customs officials or the port administration. One now retired captain explained that turning someone over to the officials was not betrayal but precaution; irrational acts threatened the reputation and thus profits of the entire crew. This is not to say that there was no freedom of choice at all; in fact, sailors managed to smuggle a full range of products from clothing to medicine to exotic animals. But the safety of the crew remained a top priority on all occasions. “This is the reason why,” the retired captain added, “here [in ports] kitchen talk was aimed not at poking fun at Soviet leaders. Instead, people shared tips on how to drug exotic parakeets so they can be hidden in socks during the border crossing yet survive the ordeal.”<sup>8</sup>

The preferred channels of distribution were almost always informal. Even though there were consignment shops (*komissionki*), most sailors preferred to use them sparingly. Not *komissionki* but *babushki* were the most important distributors in this economy. A story of one woman (now deceased) is indicative of this process.<sup>9</sup> Unlike her friends with no connections to the business, she intentionally cultivated her image of *babushka* (she was 65+ when she did the most business), and eventually Baba Mania, as most people called her, became a powerhouse in this trade.

8 The quote is from an interview with Aleksandr D., conducted by the author in Novorossiysk in 2007.

9 Several informal interviews were conducted with Baba Mania and her friends and relatives. The interviews spanned over the course of nearly fifteen years. The first interview with Baba Mania took place in August 1997 and we continued over several meetings (she died in July 1998). The relatives, including her sister (to be mentioned later), carried on with our informal conversations until the passing of Baba Mania's sister in 2007 and stepsister in 2012. Interviews also included former sailors of all ranks who went abroad between 1972 and 1982. The collection of interviews for this group is on-going.

Baba Mania received sailors in her two-room apartment, which she shared with her sister and brother-in-law. The system was similar to some of the elite clubs of the present day. A sailor's background was closely scrutinized for reliability and financial security (there was an interest in building a regular clientele base rather than taking in someone who only sold an item or two occasionally). Then “an insider” had to recommend that person, and after that the sailor received the address of “the contact”, i.e. Baba Mania, and an acceptable time to bring goods. Baba Mania was cheerful and welcoming and seemed to befriend everyone. She always had a bottle of vodka on her kitchen table and a smile to accompany it. But she was the final judge of what was taken in and how much one could charge for their goods. Baba Mania mostly took in high-end clothing, while the rest was either discarded as unsellable (to be distributed to friends as gifts) or was passed onto an extended network of lower-key sellers who took in what was too problematic to sell and of no interest to Baba Mania. *Tekhasy* (jeans), Italian shoes, leather boots, and dress shirts were her favorite items because they were in highest demand and yielded highest profits. Kids' clothing ranked relatively low on her list of priorities; it was too expensive and not long-lasting enough for most consumers (an average T-shirt cost 15-25 rubles, and since kids grow, it could last only a couple of seasons at most). Baba Mania was careful not to overcharge and marked up the goods by no more than ten percent. Nonetheless, Baba Mania's profit margin came to 500-600 rubles monthly, nearly ten times her official retirement benefit and a substantial amount by all means.

Her distribution channels were analogous to her system of acquiring goods in the first place. Potential buyers from among the

acquaintances were invited to see the goods in the apartment, and the most reliable and regular customers could even place orders for specific goods. But for things that did not sell to *svoi* (insiders), Baba Mania had to go to the open-air markets and seek buyers there. In order to avoid the charges of speculation (a criminal offense in the Soviet Union), she never took more than one item with her, and even if caught selling that item, she always managed to plead innocence. Needless to say, most *militsonery* knew her well and relied on her services, though there were always loners who were incorruptible and who wanted to uphold the system and socialist values at all cost. Overall, as several respondents reported, *babushki* were much more reliable as distribution channels for sailors than consignment shops, and most goods that did not circulate among family and friends passed through their hands. “Newcomers” and “youngsters” went to shops with their goods, but there was always a desire to find a “contact” like Baba Mania. In this particular town, as Baba Mania remembered, there were about a dozen women like herself, and then a wild range of petty sellers (or speculators, the term she used with a degrading tone) who did not have regular clientele and did not last long in the business. The business came with its share of risks (“though only the greedy ones got prison terms,” commented Baba Mania); nonetheless, the benefits were substantial as well. Aside from direct financial considerations, these women acquired so many “contacts” among various groups of people that they could even make transactions that involved property or high-deficit socialist commodities which ranged from vacation passes to cars.<sup>10</sup>

10 This system was reminiscent of “*blat*” as presented in Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favor*:

A widow herself (like all other “important” women), Baba Mania had her sister’s and her brother-in-law’s opinions to consider, not the least because they shared the apartment. Her sister was a hard-core communist who never criticized party decisions and supported the system to her last breath. She even insisted that the scarcity of some goods and the imperfect distribution system was one of the best achievements of the system that taught people to depart from *veshchism* (obsession with material goods) and embrace eternal values of kindness, mutual support, and intellectualism. Ironically, these views did not prevent her from buying foreign clothing that her sister had access to, and the explanation was often rather trivial. She either liked the design of strawberries on a particular shirt, or the color was “cute,” or something similar. Consistently, this woman and many other respondents emphasized that they wanted quality clothing that was both durable and appealing. This woman shunned Soviet undergarments for herself and preferred to see her grandchildren wear colorful dresses and trousers in colors that did not fade after a few washes. But she never once saw her purchases as being in any way contradictory to her internalized values of Soviet communism. In this way, the consumption for Baba Mania’s sister (and many others in port cities, for that matter) was not linked to a sense of westernization but to people’s sense of quality and esthetics. This correlates to the scholarship that critiques current mainstream research on socialist production and consumption for concentrating on the quantity of goods and their apparent shortages. The consumers were more sophisticated than they are commonly credited with, and they were not pushed or

*Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.



forced into buying only what was available to them. Even if the selection was not endless, the sailors attempted to match their goods to the tastes of their customers and did not offer a selection of random items. They worked hard to keenly pick designs and fashions of the day.<sup>11</sup>

Most of my respondents also did not see their consumption as linked to the black market. For the majority of the Soviet population, access to western fashions was possible only by tapping into the black market, or *fartsovka*. People who were associated with the black market, *fartsovshchiki*, resold items that they acquired from western visitors for astronomical prices. People who worked in the service sector, especially in hotels, and tour guides were regularly drawn into the business. Yet if *fartsovka* by definition included the “worship of the West” (*zapidopoklonstvo*) and the rebellion against the regime, then the consumption of the port towns was a different phenomenon, which bordered *fartsovka* only in marginal ways.<sup>12</sup> The buying of made-in clothing in port towns, though indicative of people’s fascination with specific brands and styles, coexisted with their support for the system without any contradictions. Moreover, residents of these towns did not necessarily demonstrate an interest in western pop music or in disseminating “forbidden” literature (either nationalistic for minorities, critical of the regime, or from the list of banned western authors).<sup>13</sup> Looking back at their experiences,

the respondents shared the notion that their consumption was “the process of adding to, not subtracting from our outlook,” or the process which integrated their support for what the Soviet system had to offer with a strong interest in consuming foreign goods.

One respondent, for example, was puzzled to hear a suggestion that there existed a link or some sort of connection between her near obsession with western goods and opposition or negative feelings towards the Soviet state. “I really wanted those foreign brands,” she reported.

*And I was fortunate enough to buy a new coat from Italy in late '70s, and then dress shirts for myself, from West Germany I believe, and some shirts for my kids, I think from the same place. These were not cheap at all, like I paid 100 rubles for leather boots and about 20 rubles a piece for two kid-sized T-shirts. My own dress shirts were something like 45 rubles. I made only about 120 rubles a month then and had to borrow from relatives to make those purchases. But it was worth every penny (kopeika), and I was ready to give up anything for those outfits. I loved how we looked, and the quality, style and designs were all outstanding. I loved how this clothing made me feel – special, privileged in some ways, at least not worse off than all those wives of sailors. Did I wear this clothing because it had something to say against the Soviet system? That's nonsense. I was a true patriot of my motherland. I loved the Soviet Union, especially the pioneer camps. They were fun; you sort of got a three month paid vacation if you worked there. And my kids were there as well. If given a chance, I would go back to Soviet days in a blink of an eye.<sup>14</sup>*

11 See, for example, Rossitza Guentcheva, “Material Harmony: The Quest for Quality in Socialist Bulgaria, 1960s-1980s,” *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 140-168.

12 For a specific discussion and use of this terminology, see Dmitrii Vasiliev, *Fartsovshchiki: Kak delalis' sostoianiiia: Ispoved' liudei "iz teni"*, Sankt-Peterburg: Vektor, 2007.

13 For further discussion of the latter, see, for ex-

ample, Sergei Zhuk, “Popular Culture, Identity, and Soviet Youth in Dnepropetrovsk, 1959-84”, *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* no. 1906, 2008.

14 From an interview with the author, Lena P., born in 1953, interviewed in Novorossiysk in 2004.

Over and over again the same sentiment was shared by people of different backgrounds in the small port towns when they recalled their lives in the Soviet 1970s. Though reported years after the events (more on this later), such comments were more than passing remarks suitable for the study of subjectivity and nostalgia. The tapping into the black or grey market was such a commonplace experience for these people that it made the binaries of official and unofficial, legal and illegal, rebellious and loyal meaningless or at least highly challenging to use in assessing their remarks. The two worlds were not polar opposites but formed an integral part of the same core that shaped these people's lives.

Furthermore, an interesting insight was provided by another respondent who moved from Moscow to the Black Sea coast in the mid-1970s. Then a young woman, Sasha wanted to come across as "modern" (*sovremennaiia*) and cherished everything that seemed to go with that term. But what she found in her new hometown was quite different from her experiences as a Muscovite. She recalled: "In Moscow I could buy recordings and listen to ABBA at any time but I had to tailor my own flared pants, whereas here I could buy foreign-made flared pants at any time but no one cared to listen to ABBA." Sasha also shared her observation that at times, the display of foreign fashion knew no boundaries or sense of moderation. All too often she saw people pile up clothing that did not match just because they could afford it, and she sympathized with a foreign visitor to the Soviet Union who was shocked to see many a young man in "baggy Bermuda shorts in gaudy colors that began at

his knee and reached a crescendo of bad taste with clashing shirt."<sup>15</sup>

Overall, there was sufficient supply and demand of western goods to create a steady flow of goods. While the precise volume of trade is hard to calculate, the widespread availability of certain products, especially textiles, was hard to miss.<sup>16</sup> Thus, well before the Soviet production of such items, women routinely showed off their mohair and crimplene clothing. Crimplene is a type of polyester which became fashionable and commonplace in the Soviet Union. All of it was imported through illegal channels in the 1970s in the form of "cuts" (*otrezy*), or one to two meter pieces of fabric. The cuts were used to tailor dresses and skirt suites. Crimplene had both esthetic and practical advantages; it came in a variety of designs and was wrinkle-free and easy to wash. One meter of crimplene went for 30 rubles, and most skilled tailors needed about 1.25 meters for a dress or two meters for a skirt suite. Mohair is a type of textile made of Angora goat wool (not to be confused with more high-end Angora rabbit wool). Mohair was typically used for hats, scarves, and sweaters, and in combination with highly popular flared trousers (*brukli-klesh*), any piece of clothing made from mohair made one into a true fashionista.

Anecdotally, every woman had a crimplene

15 Lois Fisher, *Survival in Russia: Chaos and Hope in Everyday Life*, Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 1993, p. 9.

16 Some indirect insight might be gained by looking at the number of ships that docked at an average port. Thus, Novorossiysk dates its post-WWII operations from 1963 (the piers were in too bad of a shape to support much business prior to 1963). It started with 162 ships annually in 1965 and expanded to over 400 ships, both domestic and foreign, that docked at the port after the new pier was completed in 1978. In post-Soviet times, the port changed its status to one of the most significant outlets on the Black Sea and has an average capacity of over 4,000 ships per annum.

Though this project is still in its developing stages as of 2012, it was envisioned some fifteen years ago, and the first set of interviews took place in 1997. Several key informants have passed away since then. All other quotes from interviews as well.

dress and a mohair hat, or at least a popular perception was such that the two products were widely available to consumers who could afford such textiles, and this is at the time when the Soviet light industry did not produce either fabric at all. Indeed, every respondent in port towns reported that they had both in their possession, oftentimes more than one item made of each textile. The same was true of a highly popular Lurex, though it became commonplace in port towns only by the end of the 1970s. Fabrics and textiles with metallic yarn, or Lurex, became a point of obsession that once again came with a high price tag for consumers. Overall, though this clandestine market “was rather limited in scope and technically illegal” and did not provide all the consumer goods, it nonetheless had the potential to create a significant flow of some products, esp. specific items of clothing.<sup>17</sup> The consumption patterns of port towns were more complex than the empty shelves in state stores, and the emphasis on the latter might obscure or simplify the reality of everyday life under late socialism. Instead, the circulation of goods became a normal part of life for port town dwellers, and they learned to aptly navigate the system and successfully combine the various forms and avenues of consumption.

The residents enjoyed wearing western clothing and drinking Pepsi (the first Pepsi factory opened in the port town of Novorossiysk in 1974) but they seemed to be oblivious to and ignorant of any subculture or the message of resistance per se. The “golden youths” of Moscow could have listened to Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong and worn T-shirts with Stars and Stripes and “US Army” logos on

them, but no equally open signs of resistance were evident in small towns.<sup>18</sup> A particular fascination with foreign goods was directly linked to people’s sense of what represented their success and position in the society. This, of course, was in no way unique to port towns. In a state of self-proclaimed equality for all, there was little room for expressing one’s social status. Social classes did not cease to exist, unlike what the Soviet people were assured, and the gap between the have and have-nots reached down to all layers of society by the 1970s and 1980s. The party elites always enjoyed special access to goods and facilities that distinguished them from the rest of the population. But for the population at large, which was becoming increasingly stratified, there were few avenues to express their social position and distinguish themselves from peers. Housing was distributed by the state and property was not privately owned, and thus the housing situation could not be improved or changed even with greater-than-average financial resources. In short, property ownership could not function as a sign of one’s social status. Cars, refrigerators, TV sets and other valuables were “sold” according to a distribution system and not purchased at will. Thus the only true outlet for visibly asserting one’s social position was clothing, which was priced on a black market out of all proportion to incomes precisely because it represented more than a way to cover one’s body. Aesthetic and practical considerations played a role (western clothing by all means looked more appealing than Soviet-produced attire), but one’s sense of personal worth and status that was vested into clothing was crucially important as well.

17 Quote from Svetlana Barsukova, Vadim Radaev, “Informal Economy in Russia: A Brief Overview,” *Economic Sociology* 13/2, 2012, pp. 4-13, here p. 5.

18 Alan Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 183-185.

A Soviet proverb exemplified this obsession with fashions when it proclaimed that “you judge a person first by his clothing and later by his intelligence.” Though in its deeper meaning the proverb was meant to downplay the importance of looks (which only mattered in making that first impression) and elevate the importance of intelligence (which with time revealed the true worth of a person), many misjudged it to mean that looks and first impressions were more important than any other attribute of human life. This was especially true of younger people of the 1970s, many of whom thought that “clothing gave young people status, prestige, and self-confidence.”<sup>19</sup> If clothing and consumerism were markers of personal and collective identity, then those markers were deeply social and socially ingrained into the fabric of everyday life.<sup>20</sup> Most consumers of western brands and clothing wanted to be like the people around them or better off in order to be embedded into their social milieu, not to oppose it. The same mentality persisted into the present day. In order to be accepted, one has to own a handbag of a particular designer or wear shoes with the acceptable minimal price tag. And even though specific costs and boundaries shifted depending on the layer of the society (the higher up the more expensive), the clothing, that proverbial first impression, nevertheless was and continues to be valued as status symbol.

Needless to say, retrospective accounts, like all memoirs and interviews, tend to be idealized, romanticized, and tainted by at least a hint

of nostalgia for those good old days. The new challenges of life in post-Soviet Russia displaced many people; for those who learned to navigate the system so masterfully, “the end of communism meant more loss than gain when suddenly the rules of the game, in which they had been so proficient, radically changed. [...] the new game was much more impersonal, global, and corporate, while networks of family and friends were no longer paramount to the functioning of the system”<sup>21</sup> (as a side note, Baba Mania was reduced to poverty by this “new game”).

Nonetheless, these realities do not take away from a more general observation of consumption in the Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s. Historian John Bushnell wrote that “throughout the 1960s and 1970s Soviet society developed spontaneously and dynamically, with a booming second economy, [...] and an increasingly complex and heterogeneous urban population.”<sup>22</sup> Though the original context of the statement refers to the rise and flourishing of youth subculture, the same would equally apply to the consumption patterns of the ever-growing number of port town residents. The volume of foreign goods that passed through port towns was so substantial that it made them almost mundane, or at least readily available. While to some residents these foreign goods in fact represented rebellion and freedom, to many more the “made-in” goods acquired added value only in the context of and in relation to socialist reality. The consumption was global and local at once, and foreign goods that circulated in small towns had less sacramental meaning attached to them than was the case

<sup>19</sup> Fisher, *Survival in Russia*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> For the discussion of consumption under socialism as part of one’s individual or collective identity, see *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, eds. Susan E. Reid, David Crowley, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Bren, *Communism Unwrapped*, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> John Bushnell, “An Introduction to the Soviet Sistema: The Advent of Counterculture and Subculture,” *Slavic Review* 49/2, 1990, pp. 272-277, here p. 276.



for major cities. Even when residents of port towns craved foreign clothing, they did not demonstrate the behavior associated with it. As Baba Mania commented, “cities are for culture, but small places like ours are where you can buy everything; here we have it all.”

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# Limits of Westernization during Cultural Détente in Provincial Society of Soviet Ukraine: A View from Below

by Sergei I. Zhuk

## Abstract

Using the personal diaries of young people from “provincial” towns and cities of Soviet Ukraine, this essay illustrates the obvious limits of Westernization during the cultural détente of the 1970s in Soviet provincial society. The narratives of the personal diaries, written during the 1970s and 80s, demonstrate that Soviet young people still shared the same communist ideological discourse, internalized it, imagined and perceived the outside world through the communist ideological “discursive lenses” and constructed their own identity, using the same communist ideological discursive elements.

**Keywords:** Soviet identity, cultural détente, youth culture, personal diaries.

One Soviet high school student who returned to the small Ukrainian town of Novomoskovsk in 1976, after five years living in Poland with his parents, was shocked by what he saw in Soviet Ukraine:

*I could not recognize my old neighborhood. It looked like the entire cultural landscape (peizazh) of my native town has changed. Everybody was dressed in Levi's jeans; everybody listens here to the British bands Sweet, Slade, Geordie, Nazareth, UFO and T.Rex. In the movie theaters they show only the films from the West, including a British movie O Lucky Man! with Alan Price band. As my father noted, it was the new cultural landscape of modernity (sovremennosti).<sup>1</sup>*

During the period of relaxation of international tensions in the 1970s known as détente not only the political and cultural centers of Soviet civilization were opened to foreign guests from the “capitalist west,” such as Moscow and Leningrad, but also the provincial

Soviet towns became exposed to the massive audio and visual information from capitalist countries on Soviet radio, television and movie screens. On March 4, 1972, a communist leader from one industrial region of Soviet Ukraine complained to local Komsomol ideologists,

*There is too much capitalist West on our Soviet television screens today... Television shows (teleperedachi) about American music and films, and western fashions prevail on our central channel from Moscow. It looks like a kind of Americanization (amerikanizatsiia kakaia-to)! It confuses our Soviet youth who try to imitate these foreign images in their behavior, which is losing familiar features of the ‘Soviet young man’... We need to stop it!<sup>2</sup>*

Ten years later, in 1982, a local newspaper still complained about “Americanization on Soviet screens.”<sup>3</sup>

1 Interview with Vladimir Sadovoi, Novomoskovsk, Dnipropetrovsk Region, Ukraine, June 3, 1993. For the cult role of *O Lucky Man!*, the British film by Lindsay Anderson, among Soviet rock music fans see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press & Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010, pp. 252-255.

2 Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Dnipropetrovskoi Oblasti, (hereafter - DADO) f. 22, op. 19, d. 2, ll. 135-145, especially 142-143. Compare with my interview with Igor T., KGB officer, Dnipropetrovsk, May 15, 1991, and Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Organiv Vlyady ta Upravlinnia Ukrainy (hereafter - TsDAVOVUU), f. 4915, op. 1, d. 3438, ll. 4-9.

3 E. Iakovlev, “Navazhdenie (kinoobozrenie),” *Dneprovskaia Pravda*, 1982, February 4, p. 3.

### Television and Movies in the Soviet Provinces during the Brezhnev Era

According to my analysis of the section in the local newspapers with "television programs" from the Kyiv, Cherkasy, Zaporizhie, Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions of Ukraine, the number of television shows containing "material from capitalist West" increased from 7-10 shows per week (10 percent of the broadcast time with prevailing material of the "informational programs" such as *Mezhdunarodnaia panorama*, and one "capitalist" movie, like the French *Count of Monte Cristo*) in 1968, to 14-18 per week (20 percent of the time with "capitalist" music numbers during music shows like *Ogonek*, special shows about Angela Davis from the US, and two capitalist movies such as BBC feature films and Italian television series) in 1972, and reaching a peak in 1978 with 24-27 shows per week (from 30 to 40 percent of the time with numerous popular music shows, like *Benefis*, and numerous US television series for children, like *Lassie*).<sup>4</sup> As one sixteen-year rock music fan reacted to the cultural détente on television in late 1977,

*It's amazing to see what is going on - on our television: since 1975 we have watched an American movie about Lassie, various broadcasts about Soviet-American space flights of Soyuz-Apollon and scientific exchanges between us and Americans. Then we have seen an English detective movie The Moon Stone, and finally, on Soviet television the official political show Mezhdunarodnaia panorama is introduced by the [unannounced] melody of One of These Days from Pink Floyd's album Meddle.*<sup>5</sup>

4 I used local periodicals such as *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, *Shevchenkiv krai*, *Vechernii Donetsk*, *Dnepr vechernii* etc.

5 School Summer Diary of Aleksandr Gusar, Pavlograd, Dnipropetrovsk Region, 1970-1977: Novem-

ber 8, 1977. During 1971 three films directed by the leftist American filmmakers were awarded by the Moscow International Festival – *Little Big Man*, *The Sandpit Generals*, *They Shoot Horses Don't They* – and in a few years they were released for the ordinary Soviet viewers.<sup>6</sup> After that *Sovetskportfilm* released on average four US films annually. Special film exchanges were organized with professional support of Soviet film critics. Some of them, like Viacheslav Shestakov, became regular visitors to the US.<sup>7</sup> In 1974 *Sovetskportfilm* released six US films, and American and Soviet film makers began a collaborative project on a new film production *Blue Bird* starring Elizabeth Taylor.<sup>8</sup> In 1977 *Sovetskportfilm* released 63 films

ber 8, 1977. The Soviet children watched on Soviet television not only the broadcast from America about the ice hockey matches between the Soviet and Canadian hockey teams, but also the American television series *Lassie* about the adventures of a collie dog, the British mystery film *The Moon Stone* based on Wilkie Collins' detective novel and various BBC television mini-series like *David Copperfield* based on Charles Dickens' novel. Meanwhile, the adult Soviet audiences fell in love with the BBC television series *The Forsyte Saga* based on John Galsworthy's novel and other western television movies, like the Italian film *The Life of Leonardo da Vinci* by Renato Castellani. According to the Soviet film critics, these movies were the most popular western feature films, shown on the Soviet TV during the 1970s. See an article about the BBC adaptation of *David Copperfield* which was shown on the Soviet TV in Aleksandr Anikst, "Bez vdokhnoveniia," *Sovetskii ekran*, 1975, No. 24, p. 4. See also a negative review of the British TV film *The Moon Stone* based on Wilkie Collins' detective novel which was shown on the Soviet TV in Aleksandr Anikst, "Kamen' okazalsia ne dragotsennym," *Sovetskii ekran*, 1975, No. 20, p. 4.

6 *Sovetskii ekran*, 1971, No. 17, pp. 1-2.

7 A. Borodin, "My mozhem dat' drug drugu mnogo tsennogo..." *Sovetskii ekran*, 1971, No. 16, pp. 16-17. See especially the books: Viacheslav Shestakov, *Amerika v zerkale ekrana: Amerikanskoe kino 70-kh godov*, Moscow: Soiuz kinematografistov SSSR, Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva, 1977; *Na ekrane Amerika*, Collection ed. I.E. Kokarev, Moscow, 1978; *Amerikanskaia khudozhestvennaia kul'tura v sotsial'no-politicheskom kontekste 70-kh godov 20 veka*, ed. A. S. Muliarchik and V. P. Shestakov, Moscow, 1982.

8 *Sovetskii ekran*, 1971, No. 24, p. 19; 1972, No. 24, p. 17; 1974, No. 24, p. 17; Semen Chertok, "Skazka



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from socialist countries and 67 movies from capitalist countries, including 12 American films, and since 1979 it kept releasing till 1982 on average eight US movies annually.<sup>9</sup> Even in 1984, during an anti-American ideological campaign in the Soviet Union the most popular foreign films among the Soviet public were still American movies such as *The Deep*, *The China Syndrome*, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *3 Days of the Condor*, and *Tootsie*.<sup>10</sup> Soviet officials noted that by the end of the 1970s, more than 90 percent of all songs in the Ukrainian city disco clubs and restaurants were of western origin. According to six personal diaries of Ukrainian high school students (four from the Dnipropetrovsk region and two from the Cherkasy region), they listened to western pop music almost every day. In 1966 almost 60 percent of all movies shown in the Ukrainian cities were of foreign origin, and 50 percent of them were films from the capitalist west. Ten years later, in 1975, almost 90 percent of the films were foreign movies, and almost 80 percent were western ones. In 1981 more than 95 percent of all movies were of foreign origin, and 90 percent came from western capitalist countries. According to the same six diaries of Ukrainian middle school students, each of them watched two or three movies during a normal school week in the 1970s. During school breaks they usually watched six to seven films per week. After 1975 (with an addition of television films), an average Soviet child (between 12 and 16 years of age) watched at least twenty six movies per week during the summer breaks. And more than a half of these

movies came directly from the capitalist west during the 1970s!<sup>11</sup>

### Soviet Culture of Diary Writing

This essay is based on personal interviews and six diaries of male contemporaries (two from the cities and four from towns) written in Russian and Ukrainian and covering the period from 1970 to the beginning of the 1980s as well as the analysis of archival documents and contemporary periodicals. The diaries belonged to different authors, who represented various social groups of urban residents in Soviet Ukraine. I now explore the influences of the massive exposure to audio and visual cultural products from the “capitalist west” on the self-construction of identity of Soviet youth from provincial Ukrainian towns. This essay is an attempt to study the concrete development of cultural détente from “the bottom up” perspective, avoiding the Moscow/Leningrad “elitist/conformist” emphasis of the recent scholarship.<sup>12</sup> My major goal is to trace the

o schastie,” 1975, No. 13, pp. 10-13, about the shooting of the US-Soviet film “Siniaia ptitsa” (Blue Bird) with US actress Elizabeth Taylor.

<sup>9</sup> *Sovetskii ekran*, 1977, No. 24, p. 17; 1979, No. 24, p. 15; 1981, No. 24, p. 15; 1982, No. 22, p. 15; *Iskusstvo kino*, 1980, No. 6, p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> *Sovetskii ekran*, 1984, No. 24, pp. 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, pp. 125, 126, 166. See also my essays: Sergei I. Zhuk, “The ‘Closed’ Soviet Society and the West: Consumption of the Western Cultural Products, Youth and Identity in Soviet Ukraine during the 1970s,” *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity: The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s*, eds. Marie-Janine Calic, Sabine Dabringhaus, Dietmar Neutatz and Julia Oberreis, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 87-117, and Sergei I. Zhuk, “Zapad v sovetskom ‘zakrytom’ gorode: ‘chuzhoe’ kino, ideologiya i problemy kul’turnoi identichnosti na Ukraine v brezhnevskuiu epokhu (1864-1982 gody),” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2009, No. 100 (6), pp. 548-565. About the notion of the “closed society” see Sergei I. Zhuk, “Closing and Opening Soviet Society (Introduction to the Forum Closed City, Closed Economy, Closed Society: The Utopian Normalization of Autarky),” *Ab Imperio*, 2011, No. 2, pp. 123-158. See for western film consumption the summer school diary of Andrei Vadimov, June-August 1971, and compare with the entries from June-August 1975, 1976 and 1977; the school diary of Aleksandr Gusar, May 30-June 7, and June 7-27, 1970, compare with the entries from June-August, 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978.

<sup>12</sup> I refer especially to Alexei Yurchak, *Everything*

construction of the notion of the “young man” (*molodoi chelovek*) in the available narratives of the personal diaries written by Soviet young people of different ages (from an adolescent stage of their life to their college graduation) during the last decades of socialism in Soviet Ukraine. Analyzing the published “personal stories of the Soviet experience,” Irina Paperno noted that those memoirs always emphasize “the negotiation between the self and community,” and “define themselves as accounts of lives embedded in a social matrix.”<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Irina Paperno, Jochen

Hellbeck and other scholars who concentrated their research on the diaries and memoirs written before 1970, on the materials, whose authors were mature adults and mainly Soviet intellectuals, I use diaries written mostly by Soviet children of middle and high school age and by very young college-age people. Moreover, in contrast to Paperno, I will demonstrate how these children’s diaries were directly “embedded in a social matrix” and served as their intimate reactions to and personal reflections on various developments of the outside world. As some scholars argue,

*personal narrative analysis demonstrates that human agency and individual social action is best understood in connection with the construction of selfhood in and through historically specific social relationships and institutions. Second, these analyses emphasize the narrative dimensions of selfhood; that is, well-crafted personal narrative analyses not only reveal the dynamics of agency in practice but also can document its construction through culturally embedded narrative forms that, over an individual’s life, impose their own logics*

*Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. Although the recent cultural studies implicitly present a history of westernization of Soviet popular culture, they missed a crucial moment in this westernization – the détente of the 1970s, especially the period from 1972 to 1979. The majority of recent studies miss and ignore the role of the détente in the westernization of Soviet media and Soviet youth culture. See, e.g., a recent book about Soviet media without even mentioning the détente: Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 12. Compare with the first history of Russian comic books in José Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*, Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. The new agreements between the Soviet Union and the capitalist west about various forms of cultural exchange, signed during the 1970s, especially the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe signed in Helsinki by the Soviet leaders together with other 34 heads of state on August 1, 1975, opened the Soviet society to new western influences through various forms of media. The beginning of the détente in US-Soviet relations and the relaxation of international tensions also resulted in some important changes in youth cultural consumption. See for the détente from the American point of view Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007, esp. pp. 282-298. Compare with the Soviet participants’ point of view in: Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 215-264. See also a German historian’s analysis in Ragna Boden, “Soviet World Policy in the 1970s – A Three-Level Game,” *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity*, ed. by Marie-Janine Calic et al. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 184-203.

<sup>13</sup> Irina Paperno, *Stories from the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009, p. xiii. Compare with another

study based on memoirs and diaries from the Stalin era: Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, especially pp. 3-13. See the general studies about writing a diary: Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999; idem, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008; Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. Compare with a recent discussion about biography and historical narrative in: “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography,” *The American Historical Review*, June 2009, Vol. 114, No. 3, pp. 573-661, and a recent study based only on the oral histories of late socialism: *Russia’s Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives*, Translated and edited by Donald J. Raleigh, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006, and Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

*and thus also shape both life stories and lives.*<sup>14</sup>

Such a construction of the self is especially apparent in diary writing.

Diary writing became the model of construction of the Soviet self from the early childhood during the period of late socialism. As an intellectual exercise, the diary writing was introduced in secondary school by the Soviet curriculum. This model for writing was based on the popular literature for children, which became obligatory for reading by all students of the Soviet middle school (from the fifth to seventh grade). As early as the beginning of the 1950s, Soviet teachers at this school level started to recommend their students to write everyday diaries. Usually, every May before the school breaks the teachers of literature announced the list of books they suggested to read during the summer. At the same time they gave special instructions how to write a diary, what kind of events the students were supposed to describe in their journals. During the 1960s and 1970s, Russian and Ukrainian language teachers encouraged their students to write personal diaries, especially during summer school breaks.<sup>15</sup>

Common practice in a majority of the Ukrainian urban schools was the recommendation to write just "a summer diary of the adventures." Sometimes teachers required their students to write these diaries as a method of collecting the necessary material for the first literary composition with the title "How I spent my summer break?" during the first classes in the fall. As a model for students' diaries, teachers

recommended using the cultural practices, which were described in the popular novels written by the famous Soviet writer Nikolai Nosov.<sup>16</sup> As one eleven-year-old student from a small town in Soviet Ukraine noted in May of 1970,

*I used Tatiana Petrovna's suggestions about Nosov's books. So I started by reading his stories about Vesiolaia semeika, Dnevnik Koli Sinitsyna and of course, I began his new book about the adventures of Vitia Maleiev, which our teacher strongly recommended to read. Now I use all these Nosov's stories as a model (obrazets) for my own diary writing.*

At least three other student's diaries from the 1970s mentioned a model role for writing the personal journal provided by Nosov's characters such as Kolia Sinitsyn and Vitia Maleiev.<sup>17</sup> Later on some of these middle school students ignored Nosov's "patterns" and emphasized other influences on their writing style. As one of them wrote in 1971, "why should we imitate those childish stories by Nosov in our diary writing? I will learn how to write a personal journal using some ideas from my favorite *Quadroon* novel by Mayne Reid or other adventure stories."<sup>18</sup>

16 Nikolai Nosov, *Vitia Maleiev v shkole i doma*, in N. Nosov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1968, pp. 489-661. For Nosov's books for children, see Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 127.

17 School diary of Aleksandr Gusar, May 20, 1970. Gusar referred to other famous stories by Nosov. All these stories were presented as the special diaries of Soviet middle school students, written in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

18 School diary of Oleg Grin, Vatutino, Cherkassy Region, June 12, 1971. He referred to a famous adventure novel by Mayne Reid, which was tremendously popular among Soviet kids. Regarding its popularity see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, pp. 109-123, and idem, "Book Consumption", pp. 207-243.

14 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories*, p. 2.

15 See my article and recent book: Sergei I. Zhuk, "Book Consumption and Reading Practices in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk during the Brezhnev Era," *Ab Imperio*, 2009, No. 3, pp. 207-243; idem, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, especially pp. 109-123.

For many Soviet students it became an important part of their everyday life – to write down events in their life. Writing helped them not only to articulate their thoughts and make notes about the remarkable events in their life (especially during their summer breaks), but also to construct their own intellectual self. And in this process the authors of these diaries followed to some extent traditional topics that their teachers recommended them to address. Over time, some of these topics disappeared from the diaries, but many of them were still present in implicit or explicit forms in their narratives. All these topics reflect the interesting moments in the construction of the Soviet self in writing by these Soviet students. As some scholars argue, their personal narratives in so-called “summer diaries” became “documents of social action and self-construction.”<sup>19</sup> I will focus on the most popular topics from those diaries, which are related to the self-construction of the Soviet young man and various identities formed by this construction: Soviet patriotism vs. capitalist world, cultural consumption and creating modern style (“to be modern and become a harmonious man”), reactions to the détente of the 1970s, fixation on western popular culture and commercialization of youth culture.

### Soviet Patriotism vs. Capitalist West

The first topic, which prevailed in all student diaries from the early stage of the Soviet middle school (fifth to seventh grade) through the high school years (eighth to tenth grade) and the first college years, is an emphasis on the authors’ Soviet patriotism and rejection of negative aspects of capitalism. For these

<sup>19</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories*, pp. 4-5.

authors a Soviet child is a patriot of his socialist “motherland.” Despite the growing influence of western cultural products, which became available during the détente in the 1970s, and the beginning of the cultural fixation on movies, popular music and fashion in the last years of high school and first years of college, the self-construction of the young man in the diaries is still based on the dichotomy of “Soviet patriot vs. western capitalism.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the available diaries of Soviet adolescents in the Brezhnev era, the Soviet films about the adventures of Soviet young patriots during the Civil War (1918-20), the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) and after the war, when young boys and girls were fighting various enemies of the Soviet state (from the Whites to “capitalist spies”), were “the most inspiring for the Soviet imagination” and “instrumental for building the Soviet identity” among the Soviet children. These films included Soviet blockbusters such as *Armia Triasoguzki*, *Neulovimye mstiteli*, *Yunga so shkhuny Kolumb* and *Skazka o Mal’chishe-Kibal’chishe*.<sup>21</sup> The most popular Soviet movie for children during the late 1960s and early 1970s was the film *Akvalangi na dne*, which

<sup>20</sup> According to the sociologist Thomas Cushman, the limited sources of foreign cultural practices always produce “an intense idealization” of the early available forms of such practices in the societies with strong ideological control and limitations. In the closed Soviet society the literature, music and films of “an important, but limited range,” Cushman explained, were “seized upon early on and became the central objects” upon which subsequent cultural practice was based. See Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> I quote my interview with Vladimir Sadovoi, Novomoskovsk, Dnipropetrovsk Region, Ukraine, June 3, 1993. Regarding the tremendous popularity of these films see *Sovetskii ekran*, 1965, No. 1, p. 20, and G. Medvedeva, “Repertuar: svet i teni,” *Sovetskii ekran*, 1965, No. 17, pp. 4-5, V. Tsygankova, “Na more i na sushe”, “Kinematografisty – detiam” *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.



was released in 1965. This film was directed by Yevgeni Sherstobitov who had already released his previous movie for children, *Skazka o Mal'chishe-Kibal'chishe*. In the new Sherstobitov film, the story of a brave Soviet boy, who tried to help the Soviet border guards to catch a foreign spy in a small Soviet resort town on the Black Sea coast, inspired millions of Soviet children. As one of them noted in his diary after watching this film the second time, in July 1971, "I want to be like Roman Marchenko to help to arrest a spy who was an enemy of my country."<sup>22</sup> Many years later the author of that diary still recalled how influential these patriotic Soviet images were for the construction of his own self. At the same time the images of the films from the "capitalist west" (which were made mostly by the leftist, anti-capitalist inclined film directors like Stanley Kramer or Sydney Pollack) helped the authors of "summer diaries" to justify their construction of the Soviet self.

The first and most popular American comedy film that opened the Brezhnev era in Soviet Ukraine and became the new movie sensation was Stanley Kramer's film of 1963, *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. It was released in the Soviet Union in late 1965, and was shown in eastern Ukraine for the first time in full theaters with all tickets sold out in January and February 1966.<sup>23</sup> According to the Soviet film magazine statistics, this film became one of the most popular foreign films that were shown in the Soviet Union in 1966.<sup>24</sup> A young moviegoer, fourteen-year-old Vladimir Solodovnik, noted during the first showing of the American

comedy in March 1966 that it was funny and dynamic. However, at the same time he felt very uncomfortable about the main story of the film, the search for money. "It looks like everybody (in the film) was driven crazy by this search," Solodovnik wrote, "the capitalist West is mad about money." He concluded this entry with a remarkable phrase: "So our propaganda was correct, in America a human greed and lust for money is the most important driving force. Even the American filmmakers such as Stanley Kramer demonstrated this in their movies."<sup>25</sup> Such ambiguous feelings about themes in Kramer's film were present in another twelve-year-old boy's writing. Andrei Vadimov noted, "It is funny to watch this hunt for money, but it's good to know that we live in a normal country, safe and comfortable, without this American madness about money."<sup>26</sup> Many Soviet filmgoers were shocked by the realistic portrayal of human greed in Kramer's film. In Kramer's comedy America looked "like an abnormal dysfunctional country" compared to the normality and stability of the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> The American comedy about "a mad hunt for money" played the role of the "negative other" from the west in the imagining of "normal" Soviet identity by young filmgoers during the beginning of the Brezhnev era.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s Soviet college students watched new American films like *The Sandpit Generals*, *They Shoot Horses Don't They*, *The New Centurions*, *Bless the Beasts and Children*, *The Domino Principle*, *Oklahoma Crude*, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *Tootsie*,

22 Summer diary of Vasilii Leshchinskii, Cherkassy Region, Vatutino, July 2, 1971. See a very critical review of this film in M. Chernenko, "Snimaetsia kino," *Sovetskii ekran*, 1966, no. 11, p. 5, and *Novyny kinoekranu*, 1966, no. 6.

23 See *Dneprovskaiia Pravda*, January 1 and January 12, February 16, 1966.

24 *Sovetskii ekran* 1967, No. 10, pp. 1-2.

25 School diary of Vladimir Solodovnik, Dnepropetrovsk region, Sinelnikovo, March 7, 1966.

26 School diary of Andrei Vadimov, Dnepropetrovsk, July 5, 1969.

27 Author interview with Vitalii Pidgaetskii at the Department of History, Dnepropetrovsk University, February 10, 1996.

and *3 Days of Condor* which presented mainly the leftist criticism of the American realities, contributing to the construction of a positive identity of Soviet self. One college student, who loved American rock and roll and western movies, noted after watching in one week of August of 1982 different American movies such as *The Domino Principle*, *Oklahoma Crude*, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *3 Days of Condor*, "we perhaps do not have enough products in our food stores and fewer cars on our roads, but our youth has a much brighter future than those Americans."<sup>28</sup> As Aleksandr Gusar commented in his diary after watching the American police drama *New Centurions*, "it is good to live in the West if you have money and power, but it is very dangerous to live there if you are just an ordinary poor man. I would rather stay in my own country."<sup>29</sup> Two anti-CIA thrillers – *3 Days of Condor* by Sydney Pollack (1975) and *The Domino Principle* by Stanley Kramer (1977) – especially influenced the negative perception of America and of "western imperialism" among Soviet college students. As some college students from eastern Ukraine explained in their writing, "The military industrial complex and the intelligence agencies rule the west. After watching Pollack's and Kramer's films, we understand that the capitalist west has no future."<sup>30</sup> And another young author who

watched these two American films after Anderson's *O Lucky Man!* movie in 1979, and who was a very enthusiastic rock music fan, noted "the capitalist society has some potential for modern development, but it is suppressed by the CIA and military machine. That is why rock music was born to challenge and criticize the politics of the West!!! And all these films, like rock music, criticize the politics of the capitalists."<sup>31</sup> As some of these authors later acknowledged, during the détente the "westernization" of the imagination had certain ideological limits for young Soviet consumers, and overall, it had an obvious very strong anti-capitalist bias.<sup>32</sup>

### Western Popular Culture and the Soviet Harmonious Man

Another important topic of self-construction, which is present in all personal narratives in student diaries, is the goal of the authors "to become harmonious men (*stanovitsia garmonicheskii-razvitoi lichnost'iu*)" – to be modern and stylish. According to a fourteen-year-old boy from a small Ukrainian town, he would devote the entire summer school break, like Leonardo da Vinci, to "harmonious education" of himself (*garmonicheskomu svoemu razvitiuu*), developing his physical abilities in sports games like volleyball, swimming every day, reading a list of "important" books, listening to Mozart concerts and the Beatles albums and playing guitar (at least two hours per day).<sup>33</sup> This goal involved certain aspects of

28 School summer diary of Oleg Grin, Kyiv, August 29, 1982.

29 See the school diary of Aleksandr Gusar, July 5, 1975. *New Centurions* originally released in US in 1972 became a very popular film in 1974-75 in the Soviet Union. See *Sovetskii ekran*, 1975, No. 10, p. 6. See how local periodicals described the American films, especially in E. Iakovlev, "Navazhdenie (ki-noobozrenie)," *Dneprovskaia Pravda*, 1982, February 4, p. 3.

30 School diary of Andrei Vadimov, Dnipropetrovsk, December 5, 1978. *3 Days of Condor* was a 1975 US political thriller movie directed by Sydney Pollack and starring Robert Redford, Faye Dunaway and Max von Sydow. Another film, *The Domino Principle* was a 1977 US thriller film starring

Gene Hackman, Candice Bergen, Mickey Rooney and Richard Widmark directed by Stanley Kramer.

31 Summer school diary of Vasilii Leshchinskii, Vatutino, Cherkassy Region, August 22, 1979.

32 See especially my interviews with Vadimov, Gusar and Suvorov.

33 Citation from the school diary of Oleg Grin, Vatutino, Cherkassy Region, May 30, 1971, p. 3; see also the diaries of Leshchinskii, May 28, 1972, and

cultural consumption directly connected to the products of western mass culture such as jeans, “beat (rock) music” etc. Paradoxically, these elements of western popular culture became connected to old notions about the major goal of Marxist education in Soviet schools – to “construct a harmonious personality.” As one fifteen-year-old student argued in 1971,

*Our teachers told us that socialism is the avant-garde of our modern civilization, so it means that everything modern, positive and humane should be incorporated in our culture. Therefore progressive music of the Beatles with their anti-capitalist songs like Eleanor Rigby or Lady Madonna should be part of our socialist culture as well. The socialist young man should be developed in harmony – you need to know physics, history, literature and contemporary music, not only Mozart, but the Beatles and Rolling Stones, etc.*<sup>34</sup>

But these ideas went against the official ideological perception of western popular culture. In January 1969, the first secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in a large industrial city in eastern Ukraine explained to Komsomol activists that the main essence of the socialist cultural consumption was the ability of young Soviet consumers to give a “correct class evaluation of the pieces of bourgeois arts and music and avoid non-critical attitudes toward a eulogy of the capitalist way of life.” He emphasized that a Marxist ideological approach would help young consumers to make good cultural consumption choices. In contrast to the degenerate western culture, the Soviet ideologist noted, Komsomol members

had to promote the best forms of their own socialist national culture. They should use the most progressive patterns of their Ukrainian culture in the struggle against western influences.<sup>35</sup>

According to the official statistics, in 1965, 90 percent of all music material produced in the city music studios in eastern Ukraine included popular songs by Soviet composers, while fewer than 10 percent had recordings of western songs.<sup>36</sup> In 1970, however, more than 90 percent of this music material had “western beat music,” mainly songs by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. In 1971, nine out of ten of the most popular songs belonged to the “beat music” category and only one of them was a song by Vladimir Vysotskii.<sup>37</sup> These figures reflected the general situation on the music market in other Ukrainian cities, especially in the Odesa, Kyiv and Cherkasy regions. By the middle of the 1970s, rock music became the most popular form of cultural consumption in Soviet Ukraine. As one contemporary mentioned, “listening to Black Sabbath, Nazareth or UFO music in the 1970s became a signifier, or marker of being a modern man even in the provincial society of the small towns of Soviet Ukraine.”<sup>38</sup>

the diary of Aleksandr Gusar, Pavlograd, Dnipropetrovsk Region, May 30, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Summer diary of Vasilii Leshchinskii, Cherkassy Region, Vatutino, May 28, 1971.

<sup>35</sup> DADO, f.22, op. 15, d. 252, l. p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> DADO, f.416, op. 2, d. 1565, ll. p. 306-307.

<sup>37</sup> Author's interview with Mikhail Suvorov, Dnipropetrovsk, June 1, 1991. See the interview with Natalia Vasilenko, Dnipropetrovsk, July 19, 2007. See also the interview with Evgen D. Prudchenko, the Central Library of Dnipropetrovsk Region, July 18, 2007 and the interview with Galina V. Smolenskaia, the Central Library of Dnipropetrovsk Region, July 18, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Author's interview with Eduard Svichar in Vatutino, Cherkassy Region, Ukraine, June 8, 2004. See also a good article about the black market in Odessa: V. Tarniv'skyi, “Tse tam, de tovkuchka,” *Molod' Ukrainy*, 1967, May 16, p. 2.

### Class and Ethnic Identity

The main result of the mass consumption of western music products was the Russification of Ukrainian youth cultures in Soviet Ukraine. To some extent, it was related to the origins and sources of information about new music which the local youth consumed. During the 1970s, all official Soviet recordings of western music were released on the state-owned label *Melodiia* with comments in Russian only. All movies from the west shown in Ukraine were dubbed in Russian only. All the best radio shows about rock music were of foreign or Russian origin.<sup>39</sup> Young consumers of western popular music from eastern Ukraine also relied on Russian periodicals because the Ukrainian editions were more cautious and conservative than the central Moscow ones. The Ukrainian Komsomol magazine *Ranok* always published awkwardly written articles with incompetent criticism of the developments in the western youth culture. Sometimes local readers were appalled by the ignorance and incompetence of Kyiv journalists. "I am tired of reading this mixture of lies and fantasy in *Ranok*," wrote one young enthusiast of rock music, "these guys from Kyiv invented the idea that American hippies were a satanic sect with a mixture of palmistry, astrology and black magic, and that hippies were looking for a virgin girl for their devilish black mass ritual and couldn't find such girls among themselves. I would

39 Interview with Mikhail Suvorov and Andrei Vadimov, Dnipropetrovsk, July 20-21, 2003; DADO, f. 19, op. 52, d. 72, ll. 25-28. Interview with Igor T., KGB officer, Dniepropetrovsk, May 15, 1991. Regarding the radio stations *Maiak* and *Yunost* see Aleksandr Sherel', *Audiokul'tura XX veka: Istoriia, estetieskie zakonomernosti, osobennosti vliianiia na auditoriiu. Ocherki*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsia, 2004, pp. 90-94. See also entries in: School diary of Aleksandr Gusar, May-August, 1972; May-August 1973; May-August 1974; and school diary of Vladimir Solodovnik, June 12, 1970; July-August 1971; July-August 1972.

rather read a boring Feofanov's book about rock music than Kyiv magazines." Because of this disappointment he stopped reading the Ukrainian youth periodicals as early as 1974, and read only *Rovesnik*.<sup>40</sup> Many Ukrainian rock fans preferred *Rovesnik* as well. As a result, the most popular youth magazine among the local rock music fans was a Russian language journal *Rovesnik*.

The Russian language became the major language of local rock bands. From the mid-seventies, the repertoire of the student concerts changed dramatically. In fact, the Russian language ousted the Ukrainian language at the major concerts organized in major cities of eastern Ukraine during the 1970s. In June 1982, during the traditional music festival "The Student Spring" in Dniepropetrovsk, all college rock bands performed songs in Russian. Even the Ukrainian folk rock band *Dniepriane* performed fewer songs in Ukrainian than usual. One journalist complained about the lack of national Ukrainian songs in the repertoire of the student bands in comparison to previous music festivals during the 1970s.<sup>41</sup> During the 1980s more local college rock bands switched from the Ukrainian language

40 School diary of Aleksandr Gusar, June 1, 1974. Gusar mentioned an article by Mykola Solomatin, "Zhertvy chornoi magii," *Ranok*, 1974, January, No. 1, pp. 18-19, and a book devoted to the history of the western pop music by Moscow journalist Oleg Feofanov, *Tigr v gitare*, Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1969. See also other publications of *Ranok*: Anatolii Povnytsia, "Tvoi dity, Brytanie," *Ranok*, 1970, No. 6, June, p. 17; 1971, No. 4, pp. 8-9; Valerii Voronin, "Amerykans'ki zustrichi," *Ranok*, 1975, No. 9, pp. 17-18.

41 L. Vdovina, "Khto vidkrye molodi talanty?" *Prapor iunosti*, May 25, 1982, p. 4. See also the official reports about the concerts organized by the trade unions and Komsomol in: DADO, f. 22, op. 26 (1979), ll. 1-160; f. 1860, op. 1, d. 2427, ll. 1-26; and publications about the dominance of the Russian language in pop culture in "Nebo muzyky," *Prapor iunosti*, June 1, 1982, p. 3, and *ibid.*, June 3, 1982, and many other issues of this periodical for 1982.



to Russian.<sup>42</sup> Local Komsomol periodicals also emphasized that in the early 1980s disco clubs stopped playing Ukrainian music.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the 1970s some Ukrainian speaking enthusiasts of rock music began speaking Russian and replaced their native language with Russian. Aleksandr Gusar, who was a native Ukrainian speaker switched from Ukrainian to Russian during the summer of 1976. Between 1971 and 1975 he wrote his diary exclusively in Ukrainian. As Gusar explained in his journal in August 1976, the language of young rockers should be English or Russian, rather than Ukrainian. That is why he switched to Russian.<sup>44</sup> At the same time his own mental construction of his national identity was developing all the time. Aleksandr Gusar, a sixteen-year-old high school student, who was always more interested in science (especially chemistry) than in the humanities, was thrilled by reading Ukrainian historical books like Ivan Bilyk's novel *Mech Areia* and decided to read all the books about Ukrainian history, including those about the Kievan princes Sviatoslav and Volodymyr and about the legendary Zaporizhian Cossacks. In his summer diary, in June of 1975 he wrote:

*My father criticizes me for reading in Ukrainian and reminds me that for my career and studies at Dnipropetrovsk University I will need good knowledge of Russian. But I can't stop reading the Bilyk's novel. My friend whose mother is a*

*librarian gave me this copy in Ukrainian. He told me that this book was forbidden and removed by the authorities from circulation. However, I am so impressed by what I had read in Bilyk's novel. It turned out that the Huns leader from the fourth century AD, Attila the Hun who controlled all of Eurasia, was our Ukrainian ancestor, Prince Hatyla. It is unbelievable! We were a great and ancient nation even before the Kievan Rus! And now we Ukrainians have been transformed into a nation of stupid and timid peasants.*<sup>45</sup>

This entry from his school diary is a good illustration of the role of the Ukrainian historical novels in identity formation in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Gusar, who idealized western rock music and whose native language was Ukrainian, switched from writing in his diary in Ukrainian to Russian in 1976 under the influence of his parents. The same year, he still continued reading his favorite Ukrainian books, and in his diary he expressed an obvious pride for the past achievements of the Ukrainian nation.

On the one hand, Aleksandr followed a typical path of Russification. He entered Dnipropetrovsk University where the language of instruction was Russian and he switched to Russian to communicate with his classmates. Eventually, Gusar adopted the Russian language. He also publicly criticized the stupidity and incompetence of Ukrainian intellectuals and Soviet conservatism of the local Ukrainian *apparatchiks*, whom he felt personified all the reactionary moments of the Soviet reality. On the other hand, Gusar wanted to know more about the historical past of his nation. He read Ukrainian historical

42 V. Sotnikova, "Eti alye 'Maki'," *Dnepr vechernii*, 1983, January 13, p. 4; L. Tsaregorodtseva, "Na stsene – 'Vodograi'," *Dnepr vechernii*, 1983, January 17, p. 4.

43 I refer also to my conversation with Natalia Ambrosimova, a journalist from the Komsomol newspaper *Prapor iunosti*, Dnipropetrovsk, May 12, 1991. See also T. Vin'kova, "Profesionaly chy dyletanty," *Prapor iunosti*, 1983, June 13, p. 4.

44 See the school diary of Aleksandr Gusar, May–August, 1976; see especially the entry on August 29, 1976.

45 School diary of Aleksandr Gusar, June 21, 1975. See also regarding the popularity of Bilyk's book Oles Buzyna, *Tainaia istoriia Ukrainy-Rusi: Vtoroe izdanie*, Kyiv: "Dovira", 2007, pp. 32–35.

novels and idealized the glorious past of Ukraine which he contrasted with backward, anti-western elements in contemporary Soviet Ukrainian culture.<sup>46</sup>

Many contemporaries of this mass Russification noted a significant social factor that contributed to this development: the influx of young migrants from local Ukrainian villages to the city. A majority of vocational schools (*professional'no-tekhnicheskoe uchilishche* – PTU) and college students came from Ukrainian peasant families. During their years of study they adjusted to the new urban conditions of life and began consuming the popular music of the city *en masse*.<sup>47</sup> As one scholar explained, these young Ukrainian peasants experienced the shock of encountering a new lifestyle. They were losing their old peasant identity, cultural preferences and stereotypes. In a russified Ukrainian city like Dnipropetrovsk many of these migrants adopted the new style of behavior that they had experienced in vocational school and college dormitories.<sup>48</sup> To some extent, they replaced elements of their Ukrainian peasant identities with new elements of urban popular youth culture, including not only the “obligatory” American jeans and long hair, but also dancing to new music, especially hard rock and disco. Many police officers and communist ideologists expressed their

concerns about this transformation.<sup>49</sup> During police interrogations PTU students who were arrested for different crimes during the late 1960s and 70s blatantly denied their Ukrainian identity. In conversations with the police officers these students, former Ukrainian peasant children, stressed that they “were not bumpkins (*byki*, or *baklany*) from the village.” They explained to the police that they wore western clothes and listened to western rock music because they wanted to look “cool” (*firmeno*) and “stylish” (*modno*).<sup>50</sup>

According to Yurii Mytsyk, “PTU and college students, former Ukrainian peasant children, became the victims of the Soviet cultural unification during mature socialism.” This cultural unification or homogenization affected Ukrainian children in big industrial cities like Dnipropetrovsk. When these children left their villages for Dnipropetrovsk and tried to adjust to urban lifestyle, they became completely immersed in the cultural homogenization of the big industrial Soviet city.<sup>51</sup> Many of them lost the major features of their Ukrainian identity. They tried to speak Russian instead of Ukrainian and wore new,

46 Author’s conversation with Professor Yurii Mytsyk, May 12, 1991, Dnipropetrovsk. He expressed similar feelings.

47 Regarding the ethno-demographic developments in the big industrial cities of Ukraine see also: Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth Century Ukraine*, London: Macmillan, 1985, pp. 171-258; Wsevolod Isajiw, “Urban Migration and Social Change in Contemporary Soviet Ukraine,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (March 1980), pp. 56-66.

48 See for a typical situation in PTU dorms M. Karpov, “Vechir u gurtozhytku,” *Prapor iunosti*, 1982, August 24, p. 3.

49 See my interview with Professor Yurii Mytsyk, Dnipropetrovsk University, January 15, 1992, and my interview with Vitalii Pidgaetskii at the Department of History, Dnipropetrovsk University, February 10, 1996. See also numerous complaints about the loss of Ukrainian identity on the dance floor in DADO, f. 17, op. 8, d. 44, ll. 1-3, 175-176; f. 416, op. 2, d. 1353, ll. 23-26, 40-49; d. 1991, ll. 4-7, 14-23. Some experts connected the loss of identity to the rise of crime among the local youth. See: DADO, f. 416, op. 2, d. 1694, ll. 6-14; f. 18, op. 60, d. 28, ll. 74-76, 79.

50 DADO, f. 19, op. 53, d. 109, ll. 28-31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 46. See also statistics for 1980-84 in DADO, f. p-18, op. 60, d. 28, l. 79.

51 Interview with Professor Yurii Mytsyk. For homogenization as part of the Soviet cultural project see: Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras*, New York: St. Martin’s, 2000, pp. 22-23. See an effect of the urban Soviet culture of the big industrial cities on the new workers, migrants from the villages and small towns in: M. D. Afanasiev, *Za knigoi. Mesto chtenia v zhizni sovetskogo rabocheho*, Moscow: Kniga, 1987, esp. pp. 36-43.

fashionable western dress; they listened and danced to the new fashionable music; and they stopped reading Ukrainian literature. Urban Soviet mass culture – influenced by western pop culture – filled a vacuum in the development of Ukrainian peasants who moved to the cities. Soviet cultural homogenization that involved millions of young migrants from villages to the cities laid the foundation for the consumption of western mass culture during late socialism. Paradoxically, this process included mass consumption of the cultural products that had previously been rejected as dangerous tools of imperialist propaganda, such as American rock and roll or disco clubs.

The détente led to an immense popularity of hard rock/glam rock among male audiences and disco among female audiences in provincial towns of Soviet Ukraine. It revealed a certain class division among a new generation of young rock music consumers. Many contemporaries noted how quickly after Beatlemania these consumers diverted their interest toward British pioneers of heavy metal like *Led Zeppelin*, *Deep Purple*, *Black Sabbath*, *Nazareth* and *Uriah Heep*. The most plausible explanation for this phenomenon came from the interpretation of similar developments during the same period among Anglo-American fans of hard rock. According to a music sociologist, a major characteristic of hard rock and heavy metal music was “its consistent non-invocation of rock history or mythology in any self-conscious or genealogical sense.” He discovered that people with a limited educational background in America used this music as an expression of their aggressive masculinity. The heavy metal look (long hair, denim jackets and jeans) “came to acquire connotations of low socioeconomic position.” As a result of their low social status and educational background, consumers of

heavy rock music were not interested “in tracing the roots of any musical traits back to periods preceding the emergence of heavy metal.”<sup>52</sup> We can see certain parallels with the situation in the Soviet hard rock and heavy metal consumption. Up until 1975 rock music consumers were predominantly from the middle and upper middle groups of Soviet society – college students, children of college professors, teachers of secondary schools, physicians, party and state functionaries (including police officers), whose music preferences included different styles of popular music – from the Beatles to Pink Floyd. After 1975 a new generation of pop music consumers emerged; the male part of these consumers (predominantly representatives of lower working class families, many of them came from Ukrainian villages), in many cases students of vocational schools or young industrial workers, preferred only hard rock music, from Led Zeppelin to AC/DC, while the female part preferred the “light” dancing tunes of Soviet *Estrada* or disco music. These young Ukrainian working class people embraced western mass culture and the

52 “While the terms ‘rock’ and ‘rock and roll’ recur within song lyrics and album titles,” Will Straw noted, “this is always in reference to the present of the performance and the energies to be unleashed now, rather than to history or to myth. Any ‘rebel’ or non-conformist imagery in heavy metal may be seen as a function of its masculine, ‘hard’ stances, rather than as a conscious participation in rock’s growing self-reflexivity... If, within a typology of male identity patterns, heavy metal listeners are usually in a relationship of polar opposition to ‘nerds,’ it is primarily because the former do not regard certain forms of knowledge (particularly those derived from print media) as significant components of masculinity – if the ‘nerd’ is distinguished by his inability to translate knowledge into socially acceptable forms of competence, heavy metal peer groups value competence demonstrable in social situations exclusively... Heavy metal ... provides one of the purest examples of involvement in rock music as an activity subordinate to, rather than determinant of, peer group formation.” See Will Straw, “Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The Case of Heavy Metal,” *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 368-381. Citations are from pages 375, 377-378, 380.

Russian language in the forms available on the dance floor and in their dormitories.

Sometimes the official Russification co-existed with sporadic explosions of the interest in Ukrainian national roots, which was provoked by trips abroad. The parents of young Vladimir Solodovnik from a small town in eastern Ukraine, who traveled to Canada as tourists during the spring of 1978, had a similar reaction after their trip abroad and meeting Canadian Ukrainians. As he noted in his diary, "My parents just returned from their tourist trip abroad yesterday. They brought for me great stuff – a pair of jeans, Pink Floyd's album *Animals* and some souvenirs. They were shocked to find out how nice and kind the Ukrainians in Canada were. As I understood from their conversation, their tourist group supervisor (*starshii grupy*) tried to stop these contacts with Canadians. But the impact [of these meetings with Ukrainian Canadians] is obvious. My old people (*stariki*) suddenly resumed speaking Ukrainian at home. They put the large pictures of Taras Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka in our living room! Now I am shocked! They are now Ukrainized (*ukrainizirovani*)!"<sup>53</sup>

Yet overall the consumption of western mass culture products during the 1970s led to Russification as the main trend in cultural development of eastern Ukraine.<sup>54</sup> As

53 Diary of Vladimir Solodovnik, Sinel'nikovo, Dnepropetrovsk Region, 1966-1978, note from May 12, 1978.

54 See: Ralph S. Clem, "The Integration of Ukrainians into Modernized Society in the Ukrainian SSR," *The Soviet West: Interplay between Nationality and Social Organization*, ed. Ralph S. Clem, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975, pp. 60-70; L. I. Poliakova, "Zminy v etnonatsionalnomu skladi naselennia pivdnia Ukrainy v 60-80-ti roky XX st.," *Pivdenna Ukraina XX stolittia: Zapiski naukovo-doslidnoi laboratorii istorii Pivdennoi Ukrainy Zaporizkogo Derzhavnogo Universytetu*, ed. A. V. Boiko, Zaporizhzhia, 1998, pp. 227-237. See also a good analysis of these trends in English: Bohdan Krawchenko, "Ethno-Demographic Trends in Ukraine in the 1970s," *Ukraine after*

Solodovnik wrote in 1976,

*What is going on with our television? A few years ago a Moscow TV channel presented rock music as 'sound of capitalist degeneration and of cultural crisis.' Now they included western rock [music] in every show. So everybody loves watching Moscow television rather than our boring Ukrainian channels with our peasant Ukrainian language. Now even my patriotic Ukrainian parents prefer 'Muscovite' (moskal'skie) channels rather than Kyiv television. It looks like Moscow television now promotes our own Soviet westernization (vesternizatsiia) in Russian!!! A year ago (1975), in Benefis of Larisa Golubkina they permitted Soviet musicians to cover 'Ms Vanderbilt' by McCartney and the Wings. This year in one show Volshybnyi fonar' I noticed at least four Russian covers of arias from rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar, including my favorite 'King Herod's Song', two covers of Beatles songs like 'Octopus's Garden' and 'Let It Be' [Budet Tak!], one with Sweet 'Funny, Funny' and Russian covers of music from American films like The Godfather, Love Story and My Fair Lady.*<sup>55</sup>

Next year another student from another small Soviet town noted,

*It is amazing how this international Détente has changed our television, cinema and, especially our perception of popular music even here in our provincial town. On a channel of the Central television, our family recently watched concerts of western music featuring ABBA and Smokey. It*

*Shelest*, pp. 101-119. See also: Goskomstat USSR, Dnepropetrovskoe oblastnoe upravlenie statistiki, *Naselenie Dnepropetrovskoi oblasti po dannym Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda*, Dnepropetrovsk, 1991, pp. 100, 102, 106, 116.

55 School diary of Vladimir Solodovnik, Sinel'nikovo, Dnepropetrovsk Region, December 7, 1976. He used both the Russian and Ukrainian language in his writing.



is impossible to imagine this even five years ago, when we had only Tatraskii's radio show about western music and some parodies of western beat music in the cartoon films such as *Bremenskie muzykanty*. And that's it. In 1972, I could buy here at the kiosk only small [pirate] records by Melodiia (label) of the old Beatles or Deep Purple songs. If I needed to buy a real album of western rock group, I had to go to the Kyiv black market. But today, here, in our **provincial small town** (!!!), I bought an officially licensed Melodiia disc of *Band on the Run* by McCartney at the same kiosk, and without going to Kyiv I bought (without any problem) an audiotape with recordings of my favorite disc *Wish You Were Here* by Pink Floyd from the same vendor at the same kiosk [iz pod prilavka] for only 10 Roubles!!! In our small town this entire week only foreign movies were shown. I myself watched two American films, one Italian, and one French film this week. Tonight my mom watched television shows and films only from the capitalist West. She was so frustrated by this '**capitalist invasion**' in our culture that she called this situation '**the détente's new cultural revolution**'.<sup>56</sup>

As one contemporary summarized the situation in the Soviet media during the 1970s,

*It was a real western cultural invasion in the Soviet Union. Since 1975 the Soviet audiences had been exposed to the massive attacks of images and sounds from the capitalist West on television, in movies, on the radio, on music records, and of course on the dance floor. Paradoxically, everybody here (in Ukraine) who loved western music and films and considered himself a 'modern young man' began to mentally associate and identify himself with 'progressive and westernized' Moscow and Russian language as a language of*

<sup>56</sup> School diary of Oleg Grin, Vatutino, Cherkasy Region, January 16, 1977.

*modernity* [iazyk sovremennosti], rather than with conservative and backward Kyiv and their stupid policy of Soviet Ukrainian anti-western patriotism.<sup>57</sup>

The search for the authentic west deeply impacted the process of identity formation of the young Soviet consumers of the western cultural products. In the Soviet Ukraine, these consumers tried to identify only with the west or its legitimate substitutes, which by the end of the 1970s lost any connections with Soviet Ukrainian culture. In the imagination of these consumers, the official Soviet Ukrainian culture represented all the most conservative, backward and anti-western elements in their life. "Only idiots and peasants listen to Ukrainian Estrada, the normal *razvitye* (smart, intelligent) people listen to real rock music from the real West," wrote Andrei Vadimov, a future activist of the discotheque movement, in September 1976. The same year Aleksandr Gusar, a future organizer of a dorm disco club at Dnipropetrovsk University, noted in his high school journal, "You must be stupid enough to say that Ukrainian Estrada songs are better than western rock music. Ukrainian music exists only for bumpkins. All intelligent youth now listen to classic rock from the West."<sup>58</sup>

By accepting the real west as a part of their identity, these young rock music fans and discotheque activists rejected the official Soviet version of their own ethnic identity. Eventually this process of identification

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mikhail Suvorov, Dnipropetrovsk, June 1, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> The quotations are from a school diary of Andrei Vadimov, September 10, 1976, Dnipropetrovsk, and school diary of Aleksandr Gusar, October 21, 1976, Dnipropetrovsk. See also the school diary of Vladimir Solodovnik, June 12, 1972. Compare with the entries from the school diary of Mikhail Suvorov, February 12, 1977.

with the real west leveled national cultural differences among the active consumers of western mass culture and contributed to what some scholars called a homogenization of the Soviet culture that meant a mass Russification of the youth cultures in eastern Ukraine during the 1970s.<sup>59</sup>

The personal diaries reflect an appearance of the new model of construction of the young man during the beginning of the 1980s. Growing up, the authors, now college students, began distancing themselves from their idealistic perceptions of Soviet patriotism and incorporating more idealization of the products of western popular culture in their narrative and describing their commercial activities in an unusual cynical way. At the same time, their narratives demonstrate a presence of the traditional discourse of young Soviet men, Komsomol activists, who tried to adjust to the new realities of Soviet life. As one now sophomore college student from eastern Ukraine, who was actively involved in black market activities and recently married, noted in 1982, "What is bad about wishing to live a better and comfortable life under socialism? Is it against the teaching of Karl Marx? I am making money by trading music; therefore I add something to our family budget, because

my salary is not enough for my family."<sup>60</sup> In December 1978, another college student, who became the most prominent disc jockey in a big Ukrainian industrial city, wrote in his personal diary,

*I am twenty years old. Sixty years ago people of my age carried out the Revolution in my country. Meanwhile, our Komsomol bosses criticize me for being **too young** to organize the central city disco club and have all financial responsibilities!*

Ten years later, in November 1989, the same author, who now graduated from his college and became a successful organizer of a Komosmol business in the same city, still complained in his diary, "This **young** jerk [pridurok], a regional Komsomol secretary, who is **much younger** than me, tries to teach me that I am **too young** to handle video salons in this district!!!"<sup>61</sup> Other personal diaries of Soviet young men who lived during late socialism also show how their authors internalized the Soviet ideological clichés, which they used constantly in their narratives to explain their commercial activities.

As we see, personal narrative analyses of diaries written by young people from Soviet Ukraine demonstrate how the authors of these diaries constructed their own intellectual model of the Soviet young man, reflecting the outside influences and their own intellectual adjustment to these changing influences. It is true that my analysis of these diaries demonstrates "their rootedness in specific, and generally very limited social milieus and phases of the life cycle as well as the changing conventions that affected what they expected

59 Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*, pp. 22-23. For the homogenization of Soviet Culture during Stalin's time see Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, Transl. by Jesse M. Savage, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1997, and during the Brezhnev era in Natalia E. Dobrynina, *Cherty dukhovnoi obshchnosti: Russkaia khudozhestvennaia literatura v chtenii mnogonatsional'nogo sovetskogo chitatelia*, Moscow: Kniga, 1983, esp. pp. 51-69. For a concept of "Soviet people" see Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 7, pp. 43, 92. For the Soviet evaluation of the homogenization of the youth culture through cultural consumption see Sergei I. Plaksii, *Tvoi molodoi sovremennik: Problemy sovershenstvovaniia obraza zhizni rabochei molodioshi v zerkale sotsiologii*, Moscow: "Molodaia gvardiia," 1982, esp. pp. 146-160.

60 Summer school diary of Mikhail Suvorov, Dniepropetrovsk, May 28, 1982.

61 Summer school diary of Andrei Vadimov, Dniepropetrovsk, December 5, 1978; and his diary, November 17, 1989.

to reveal and conceal.”<sup>62</sup> Yet at the same time these diaries give us a unique opportunity to see personal perceptions of the reality in writing and their evolution during the period of late socialism.

### Conclusions: The Limits of Soviet Westernization

The personal diaries from “provincial” Ukraine are a good illustration of the obvious limits of westernization during the cultural *détente* of the 1970s in Soviet provincial society.<sup>63</sup> Despite the discursive attempts in the diary narrative of these authors to distance themselves from the Soviet cultural forms (especially in their consumption of popular culture) and embrace the forms of western mass culture, the diaries are a proof of the dominance of various elements of the Soviet ideological discourse in their mentality.

The entire point of reference, the system of moral values used in this construction derived from and was adjusted to Soviet ideological discourse, which was based on the popular notions of Soviet socialist modernity (*sovremennost'*). Even the choice

of language, the preference for Russian over Ukrainian for a native Ukrainian speaker, was influenced by these notions of Soviet modernity. Paradoxically, westernization of Soviet provincial popular culture during the *détente* led to cultural Russification of youth culture in non-Russian (in my case Ukrainian) “provincial” society. Moreover, this analysis challenges the ideas of recent literature about Soviet youth culture during late socialism. According to these ideas, after Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization, communist ideology in Soviet society underwent a so-called *performative shift*, when Stalin’s authoritative discourse lost its importance and became a mere ritual for many Soviet people, who tried to exist *vnnye* – outside – this communist ideological discourse since the 1950s. The narratives of the personal diaries, written during the 1970s and 80s, demonstrate that Soviet young people still shared the same communist ideological discourse, internalized it, imagined and perceived the outside world through the communist ideological “discursive lenses” and constructed their own identity, using the same communist ideological discursive elements.<sup>64</sup>

62 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories*, p. 92.

63 For the limitations in the *détente* politics among the Soviet intellectual elites see Sergei I. Zhuk, “‘Academic *Détente*’: IREX Files, Academic Reports, and ‘American’ Adventures of Soviet Americanists during the Brezhnev Era,” *Les Cahiers du Monde russe*, 2014, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 81-106. The best confirmation of this process can be found in recent studies of consumption in late socialism. See Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013 and Anna Ivanova, *Magaziny “Berezka”: Paradoxy potrebleniia v pozdnem SSSR*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017 and Sergei Zhuk, “‘The Disco Mafia’ and ‘Komsomol Capitalism’ in Soviet Ukraine during Late Socialism,” *Material Culture in Russia and the USSR: Things, Values, Identities*, ed. Graham H. Roberts, London and Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, pp. 173-195.

64 See also how the Soviet youth became obsessed with the western (especially American) cultural products even before Khrushchev, during the 1940s, before Yurchak’s “*performative shift*, when Stalin’s authoritative discourse lost its importance and became mere rituals for many Soviet people” in my article: Sergei I. Zhuk, “Inventing America on the Borders of Socialist Imagination: Movies and Music from the USA and the Origins of American Studies in the USSR,” *REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia*, 2013, 2 (2), pp. 249-288, and in my recent book, Sergei I. Zhuk, *Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and American Studies in the USSR: People’s Diplomacy in the Cold War*, Lanham, MD and Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield’s Lexington Press, 2017, pp. 45-74.

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# Watching Television and Emotional Commitment in the Late Soviet Union

by Kirsten Bönker

## Abstract

As a popular consumer good, television transformed Soviet households' material culture and lifestyle. It interconnected time and space in a new way and helped to constitute the Soviet audience as 'emotional communities'. It did so by providing a specific entertainment culture that supported the regime's claim of guaranteeing a decent lifestyle to many groups of Soviet society. Oral history interviews reveal that people's representations of Soviet television are a still persistent source of emotional commitment to the former Soviet life.

**Key words:** television, late Soviet Union, emotional bonding, post-Soviet nostalgia, oral history interviews.

"I sincerely believed to live in the best country, everything [was] fine." Georgii, who frankly admitted that he has thought this way in Soviet times, was born in Leningrad in 1953 and raised in the family of an established scientist. He also confirmed his perception of Soviet TV<sup>1</sup> contents insightfully: "I believed that everything [he aimed at TV broadcasts] was true."<sup>2</sup>

In an interview in 2010, Georgii was asked to talk about his TV watching habits during the Soviet period of his life. I take his remarks as a starting point to explore Soviet television's capacity to evoke an emotional commitment among viewers towards their Soviet life. Thus, I am interested in affirmative as well as rejecting emotions that were stimulated by watching television and that potentially contributed

to the cohesion of the Soviet society or challenged it.<sup>3</sup> This question ties into the much

3 Emotions constitute a highly complex phenomenon and unsolved interdisciplinary problem incurring competing and sometimes even opposite answers to the question of how to explore them. Historians find it difficult to detect them beyond their linguistic, discursive or symbolic representations. Based on a predominantly social-constructivist approach, historical research mostly does not differentiate between the inner self and the outside representation of emotions. This means that historians more or less disregard emotions as a psychological state of mind that may exist without language. The obvious reason is that we have no or at least only few sources to analyze emotions in past times apart from their external representations. For similar pragmatic reasons I will explore here the emotional setting in the course of watching television on the basis of oral history interviews. Therefore, I tend to the social-constructivist approach in order to trace, on the one hand, how the respondents retrospectively represent their emotional state watching Soviet television. On the other hand, I aim to relate these emotional attitudes to the socio-cultural factors possibly shaping and framing them. For this purpose, I draw on the concept called 'media culture of emotions' ('Medien-Gefühlkultur'). In my understanding, the term describes a process of emotional commitment that referred to the socio-political subtext of the TV program representing the Soviet way of life. Thus, the 'media culture of emotions' was immediately entangled with an officially routinized and socially accepted popular culture. Cf. Rüdiger Schnell, *Haben Gefühle eine Geschichte? Aporien einer History of Emotions*, Teil 1, Göttingen: V&R, 2015, pp. 15–59; Ulrich Saxer, Martina Märki-Koepp, *Medien-Gefühlkultur: Zielgruppenspezifische Gefühlsdramaturgie als journalistische Produktionsroutine*, München: Oelschläger, 1992; Knut Hickethier, "Das Fernsehen der DDR", *Wie im Westen, nur anders: Medien in der DDR*, ed. Stefan Zahlmann, Berlin: Panama-Verlag, 2010, pp. 119–130, here p. 123, 128.

1 When speaking of "Soviet TV", I refer to different interest groups and actors that influenced television programs: the professional groups such as journalists, editorial staff members, artists, producers, directors, anchor people, presenters and technical staff, on the one hand, and representatives of party and state organs trying to impinge on the programming on the other hand. This is, however, far from a sharp differentiation between the fields of action and interests, as many people belonged as party members e.g. at least to two spheres.

2 Georgii is higher educated, but currently works as a minor public employee in St. Petersburg. Like his father he was a member of the Communist Party. The interview was conducted by Elena Bogdanova in September 2010 in St. Petersburg.

broader discussion on how to explain the durability of the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s until perestroika. Georgii's interpretations raise questions about the role of television in this context. Like in capitalist Europe, television became part of everyday life from mid-1960s on. My thesis, that I try to outline here, is that many people felt entertained by Soviet television broadcasts and thus engaged with a new Soviet popular culture which was not least shaped by the medium. Television constituted a dynamic force within the field of new materialism, mass consumption, and the demand for extended leisure time.<sup>4</sup> Kristin Roth-Ey has demonstrated that early TV enthusiasts envisioned the new medium bringing back 'truth' into Soviet society after Stalinism and shaping the New Soviet Man. However, the search for 'cultural authority' turned out to be much more ambivalent than TV producers initially thought.<sup>5</sup> The Communist Party developed its own demands for cultural education towards the medium, whereas the audience perceived TV more and more as the most important medium of entertainment. The viewer letters to Central TV provide insight into the audience's preferences: Most viewers just wanted to relax and to get into a good mood watching television at home.<sup>6</sup>

4 Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Krushchev", *Slavic Review* 61, 2002, pp. 211–252; David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, "Introduction: Pleasures in Socialism?", *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, Evanston/ILL.: Northwestern University Press, 2010, pp. 3–51.

5 Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 223–280; see also Simon Huxtable, "The Problem of Personality on Soviet Television, 1950s–1960s", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3, 2014, 5, pp. 119–130.

6 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, p. 201; Kirsten Bönker, "'Dear television workers...': TV consumption and Political Communication in the Late Soviet Union", *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 56, 2015, 2–3, pp.

Roth-Ey argues that the idea of a self-sufficient and superior Soviet media culture became "a life-and-death exercise in self-defense". She suggests that the Soviet Union "lost the cultural Cold War", as it failed to establish an attractive media empire.<sup>7</sup> I would be more cautious about this interpretation of media cultures as binary black boxes. Exchanges of television programs among the socialist states, between eastern and western TV stations, broadcasts of common features within the transmission range of *Intervision* or live link-ups between *Eurovision* and *Intervision* let us suppose that cross-references and amalgamations prospered across the Iron Curtain.<sup>8</sup>

Based on a sample of 80 interviews covering practices of watching television in the late Soviet Union,<sup>9</sup> this article focuses on the

371–399.

7 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, pp. 7, 23.

8 Cf. Katalin Lustyik, "From a Socialist Endeavour to a Commercial Enterprise: Children's Television in East-Central Europe", *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, eds. Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens, and Katalyn Lustyik, New York and London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 105–122; Thomas Beutelschmidt, Richard Oehmig, "Connected Enemies? Programming Transfer between East and West during the Cold War and the Example of East German Television", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 60–67; Yulia Yurtaeva, "Intervision: Searching for Traces", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 23–34; Heather L. Gumbert, "Exploring the transnational media exchange in the 1960s", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 50–59; Michael Meyen, *Denver Clan und Neues Deutschland: Mediennutzung in der DDR*, Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2003; about Poland: Patryk Wasiak, "The Great Epoch of the Consumption of Imported Broadcasts: West European Television Channels and Polish Audiences during the System Transition", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 68–78.

9 For more details see my forthcoming book *Brave New World? Watching TV and Political Communication in the Late Soviet Union*, Lanham/MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington Books, 2018. The sample comprises 48 women and 32 men born between 1929 and 1965. Women are overrepresented for pragmatic reasons, because they were much more willing to be interviewed. Most of the interviews were conducted by experienced Russian sociologists and

“ordinary” TV viewer.<sup>10</sup> The interviews were conducted between 2010 and 2012 in a phase of increasing nostalgic outlooks on the Soviet past. The sample does not thoroughly represent the social structure of European Russia. Instead it drew on a variety of ideal types.<sup>11</sup> People with higher education are overrepresented in relation to the Soviet populace, because they tend to offer a greater variety of viewing habits and to assess TV content in a more differentiated way than people with less education.<sup>12</sup>

First, I will give a quick overview of the phenomenon of nostalgia that we encounter in the interviews. Second, I will outline how

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historians. The guideline was applied in a flexible way to react to the topics the respondents touched upon. The questions should stir the interviewees to think of earliest memories of television and then to look back on concrete practices and changes during her or his life. This kind of “interview of remembrance” refers to: Gabriele Rosenthal, *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte: Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen*, Frankfurt a.M., New York: Campus, 1995, pp. 70–98; Roswitha Breckner, “Von den ‘Zeitzeugen’ zu den ‘Biographen’: Methoden der Erhebung und Auswertung lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews [1994]”, *Oral History*, ed. Julia Obertreis, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012, pp. 131–151.

10 “Ordinary” refers to people who did not enjoy access to the elites’ system of distribution. They were defined by their lack of formal political power. The notion “regime” refers to official representatives of organizations such as the party, government, trade unions etc.

11 For the ideal types of viewers, I follow Michael Meyen’s approach to GDR television audience. He identified five ideal types: the compliant, the affirmative, the indifferent, the reserved and the subversive one. Cf. Michael Meyen, *Einschalten, Umschalten, Ausschalten? Das Fernsehen im DDR-Alltag*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitäts-Verlag, 2003, pp. 98–109.

12 The majority of the respondents were urban dwellers, although rural areas are well represented. During the Soviet era, they primarily lived in the cities and counties of Moscow, Leningrad, Kuibyshev (Samara), Rostov on Don, Yaroslavl, Irkutsk, and Kemerovo. All levels of education were included, but academics (64% among women, 70% among men) constitute the majority of respondents. The interviewees belonged to different social groups and differed in their purchasing power, privileges, and social networks.

watching TV became part of leisure practices. In the third part I will take up a perspective on television’s capacity to familiarize societal topics, ideas, and values by engaging in the discourse of the ‘good Socialist life’. Although it especially does so in the field of entertainment and popular culture, television was not devoid of political potential. I will argue that television became a force that decisively shaped the ‘politics of pleasure’<sup>13</sup> by choosing entertainment topics with everyday relevance. This means that television was able to create meanings and interpretations on which viewers could negotiate. I track Stuart Hall’s interpretation according to which television could be a source of social consensus. One should not paint a harmonious and uncontested picture of Soviet popular culture. However, my point is that Soviet television at least suggested interpretations that could be accepted by viewers without necessarily fully agreeing. I give more emphasis to the idea that television refers to broadly familiar interpretation frameworks in order to have made ‘ordinary’ viewers to go along with them.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the frameworks of interpretation in a Soviet-style society were much straighter than in liberal systems. But Soviet television, nonetheless, opened up a variety of interpretations from hegemonic to oppositional readings. The turn to less overt and less violent control after Stalin’s death changed the rules of communication. It went hand in hand with the search for

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13 I borrow this term without fully adopting the cultural studies’ suggestion of a hegemonic order that is contested by ‘oppositional’ popular pleasure. See the discussion in *Politik des Vergnügens: Zur Diskussion der Populärkultur in den Cultural Studies*, eds. Udo Göttlich, Rainer Winter, Köln: Halem, 2000.

14 See Stuart Hall, “Die strukturierte Vermittlung von Ereignissen”, *Grundlagentexte zur Fernsehwissenschaft: Theorie – Geschichte – Analyse*, eds. Ralf Adelman et al., Konstanz: UVK, 2001, pp. 344–375, 357.

more pleasure and joy, with the cultural thaw, and with the pressing question how to balance individual and collective 'Soviet' interests.<sup>15</sup>

### Interviews, Commitment, and Post-Soviet Nostalgia

Oral history interviews are not an easy type of source, especially as the interviewees may tend towards nostalgia.<sup>16</sup> However, interviews stimulate the respondents to update memories by entangling temporal and spatial layers of the Soviet past with current perceptions. Although nostalgia differs from contemporary contentedness, the respondents' narratives may reveal the communicative foundation of the society. They give us a notion of how the interviewees attribute sense to their past Soviet lives by contextualizing their memories.<sup>17</sup>

15 See the articles in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, Evanston/Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2010; Oksana Bulgakowa, *Cine-Weathers: "Soviet Thaw Cinema in the International Context"*, *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Eleonor Gilburd and Denis Kozlov, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013, pp. 436–480; *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006.

16 Nostalgia is a phenomenon that involves different groups of agents from within and outside the respective society. For a conceptualization with regard to former socialist societies see the instructive book of Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. xviii. Boym conceptualized nostalgia as consisting of two narratives, the reflective and the restorative one. The restorative strategy seems to have preponderance in contemporary societies of former bloc states. Nostalgia is a somehow ubiquitous phenomenon in all former socialist states. For nostalgia in contemporary Russia see recently Ekaterina Kalinina, "Multiple faces of the nostalgia channel in Russia", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 108–118. With regard to nostalgic TV consumption in the Czech Republic: Veronika Pehe, "Responses to *The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* in the Czech Republic", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3/5, 2014, pp. 100–107.

17 See for the effect Cold War chronotopes still have today: Alaina Lemon, "Sympathy for the Weary State? Cold War Chronotopes and Moscow Others", *Com-*

Further, Soviet television has itself interlaced different time layers and dimensions of space. From its beginnings in the mid-1950s, viewers perceived television as having opened a "window to the world", as some respondents put it.<sup>18</sup> Current television complicates these layers even more by rerunning Soviet features today. In this context, the interviews reveal self-perceptions, individual practices, motives, and interpretations on TV watching and media use.

Georgii's statements on the credibility of Soviet television contradict long established arguments claiming that television did a great deal to destabilize Socialist states.<sup>19</sup> And indeed, new research on Socialist mass media takes another track: Some researchers have recently underlined socialist television's capacity to attract viewers.<sup>20</sup> Historian Paulina Bren explains the great popularity of Jaroslav Dietl's TV series by showing how they manifested the normalization of daily life. They had become the CSSR's "shared common places" during the 1970s and 1980s and were symbols of the "banality of normalization".<sup>21</sup>

*parative Studies in Society and History* 51/4, 2009, pp. 832–864.

18 With special regard to the evening news program *Vremia* (Time): Christine Evans, "A 'Panorama of Time': the Chronotopics of *Programma Vremia*", *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* 2, 2010, pp. 121–146.

19 Cf. Kurt R. Hesse, *Westmedien in der DDR: Nutzung, Image und Auswirkungen bundesrepublikanischen Hörfunks und Fernsehens*, Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988.

20 Meyen, *Denver Clan*, chapter 4; Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism. Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014, pp. 135–159; Sabina Mihelj, "The Politics of Privatization: Television Entertainment and the Yugoslav Sixties", *The Socialist Sixties: The Global Movement in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Cuba*, eds. Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 251–267.

21 Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism After the 1968 Prague Spring*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2010, pp. 202–206.



The banality of normal life, one could argue, was the downside of the new consumerist lifestyle with its privatized leisure practices.<sup>22</sup> It was the seed of emotional commitment towards the socialist regimes, because television opened up a place for negotiation between TV program-makers, journalists, artists, and the party elite.<sup>23</sup> Although most of the TV staff became party members until the 1970s, the negotiations crisscrossed the lines of political control as television provided new media logics that were more difficult to control.<sup>24</sup>

Georgii's narrative very well represents the retrospective affirmation to the lost Soviet state that often disregarded aspects of control and repression.<sup>25</sup> Today, Russian state television circulates representations of the Soviet social life via Soviet crafted serials and films. Thus, it is television, in particular, that keeps Soviet signs, interpretations, values, and emotions current.<sup>26</sup> This kind of circulation reminds us not to presuppose that television destabilized the political regime and to draw a continuous

line from a westerly supposed incredibility of television as a source of information from our western perspective to its would-be rejection as a pleasure-giving entertainment medium. Apart from the audience living on the Soviet periphery most viewers had no access to foreign TV programs that might have disturbed Soviet media representations. Even listening to foreign radio stations like *Radio Liberty* should not be supposed to be a practice of media use that necessarily generated criticism on the Soviet way of life.<sup>27</sup>

### Leisure Time and the Spread of Television

Television substantially changed the Soviet lifestyle. Recent research strongly suggests that the consumer culture of the 1960s and 1970s became a cohesive factor that rather held the regime and society together instead of destabilizing it because of the deficiencies of the consumer society.<sup>28</sup> Small family apartments as well as technical household equipment such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, radios, and TV sets became symbols of the improving quality of life for many people after the late 1950s.<sup>29</sup> During the 1960s however, TV sets had constituted more or less luxury goods, before they lost their aura of singularity as former Soviet TV viewers indicated. Many of the respondents reported that TV sets

22 Lifestyle, notions of personality, individuality, and consumption gained an intrinsic relationship since Khrushchev had promised to catch up with the USA. See Larissa Zakharova, *S'habiller à Soviétique: La mode et le Dégel en URSS*, Paris: CNRS Ed., 2011; Anna Paretskaya, "A Middle Class without Capitalism? Socialist Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in the Late-Soviet Era", *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, eds. Neringa Klumbytė and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 43-66.

23 See Christine Evans, "Song of the Year and Soviet Culture in the 1970s", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12/3, 2011, pp. 617-645.

24 Dana Mustata, "Television in the Age of (Post-) Communism: The Case of Romania", *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, eds. Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens, and Katalyn Lustyik, New York, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 47-64; Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, pp. 236-268.

25 See for a critique of historiography updating Cold War tropes and being blind to emotional ascriptions to the state Lemon, "Sympathy for the Weary State?"

26 With regard to post-Soviet TV: Elena Prokhorova, "Challenging Nostalgic Imagination: The Case of Dmitry Astrakhan", *The Slavic and East European Journal* 48/3, 2004, pp. 421-437.

27 See Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, p. 174; Kirsten Bönker, "'Muscovites are frankly wild about TV: Freizeit und Fernsehkonsum in der späten Sowjetunion', 'Entwickelter Sozialismus' in Osteuropa: Arbeit, Konsum und Öffentlichkeit", eds. Nada Boškovička, Angelika Strobel, and Daniel Ursprung, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016, pp. 173-210, 198-201.

28 Cf. Ekaterina Emeliantseva, "The Privilege of Seclusion: Consumption Strategies in the Closed City of Severodvinsk", *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* 2, 2011, pp. 238-259, esp. 238-244; Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, London, New York: Routledge, 2013.

29 Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," p. 219.

were among the first purchases of young couples after the late 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

Watching television had long been a rather urban practice, because TV sets were much more common in urban areas than in the villages. Many interviewees remembered well that they first watched TV when visiting relatives in the cities. The respondents claimed that in the countryside watching TV remained a joint social practice of family, friends, and neighbors until the early 1970s. Thus, most of the Soviet people had access to television since the late 1960s. Statistics counted one TV set per seven persons in 1970, one per four persons in 1980, and one per 3.2 persons in 1988. They spread in a similar way in the GDR or West Germany.<sup>31</sup> However, televisions were among the commodities that Soviet customers most often returned for warranty to the retailers.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding these technical problems, viewers and TV staff were fascinated by the transmission speed of the new medium: "Political information entered our domestic life as if we ourselves had been involved", cheered a viewer on the occasion of Khrushchev's visit to the United States in 1959. This TV consumer even described the medium as having evoked pride

among the audience watching all the historical events of the year.<sup>33</sup>

The broadcasting time rose quickly: Since 1955 TV aired daily in Moscow and Leningrad. In the mid-1950s, viewers received two programs in big cities. They could watch three programs in the capitals from 1965. A fourth program and regular color television were aired since 1967. TV stations also spread quickly. There were only nine stations in 1955, but in 1960 already 84, 1965 121, reaching an amount of 131 in 1975, all providing a nationwide TV coverage.<sup>34</sup>

Starting from mid-1950s, Soviet sociologists demonstrated that TV consumption had become an integral part of the socialist way of life.<sup>35</sup> People watched more and more television while the TV program steadily expanded. This was not least due to the fact that the party gradually included television in its propaganda strategies from the mid-1960s.<sup>36</sup> The 1977 constitution let Soviet citizens explicitly perceive cultural consumption as a legitimate demand to the new Soviet lifestyle. It granted them the right to rest and to leisure, as well as the right to enjoy cultural benefits (Article 41, 46). The Soviet state was supposed to ensure this by "developing television and radio broadcasting".<sup>37</sup>

Contemporary Soviet audience studies already observed in the mid-1960s that television especially attracted the less educated.

30 Boris Firsov, "Srednego zritelia net", *Zhurnal-ist* 12, 1967, pp. 42–45, 43; Bönker, "Muscovites are frankly wild about TV", p. 181.

31 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo 1922–1972*, Moscow: Statistika, 1972, p. 314; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1988 g.: Statisticheskii ezhegodnik*, Moscow: Statistika, 1989, p. 119; Stephan Merl, "Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft: Rußland und die ostmitteleuropäischen Länder", *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums (18.–20. Jahrhundert)*, eds. Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Kocka, Frankfurt a.M. and New York: Campus, 1997, pp. 205–241, 227.

32 Alone 31 % of the annual production of colour televisions and 25 % of black and white sets were claimed under warranty in 1987. See the statistics of the ministry of trade: RGAE (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki), f. 465, op. 1, d. 4510 (1988), ll. 6–14. These rates had changed little since the 60s. I am much obliged to Stephan Merl for providing me with these data.

33 GARF (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), f. 6903, op. 1, 1933–1970 gg.: Sekretariat predsedatel'ia i otdel kadrov, d. 612, 1959: Stenogramma zasedaniia obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei pri tsentral'noi studii televideniia, ll. 4–5.

34 Aleksandr Ia. Iurovskii, *Televidenie – poiski i resheniia: Ocherki istorii i teorii sovetskoi telezhurnalistiki*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983, pp. 41–43.

35 Boris Firsov, *Televidenie glazami sotsiologa*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971, p. 105.

36 Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, pp. 208–222.

37 Cf. <http://www.constitution.org/cons/ussr77.txt> (accessed 1 September 2014).

However, respondents of all social groups described “entertainment” and “rest” as television’s prime functions.<sup>38</sup> Many viewers eagerly strove to schedule their work days not to miss interesting programs and repeatedly demanded more entertainment programs.<sup>39</sup> From the beginning, watching practices severely depended on gender as well as on the professional and educational background of the viewers. Both sexes spent about half of their leisure time more or less concentrated in front of the TV set. Especially for men, watching TV became a more and more absorbing practice, whereas women more often watched TV while doing housework. In the mid-1970s working men watched about 10, in 1986 14.5 hours per week. In contrast working women spent only 3.5 hours every week in 1965 and 10.7 hours in 1986 in front of the screen.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the better educated the people, the smaller the scale of TV consumption. Especially men favored watching TV to reading newspapers or books from the 1970s onwards.<sup>41</sup> People in villages watched more programs than the urban population from the late 1960s because of the lack of leisure activities.<sup>42</sup>

38 Firsov, “Srednego zritel'ia net”, p. 44.

39 GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, 1952-1970 gg.: Otdel' pisem, d. 46, 1963, Obzor pisem telezritel'ei ob uluchshenii programm Tsentral'nogo televizionnogo podgotovlennymi nauchno-metodicheskimi otdelami, ll. 3, 7; GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 612, 1959, l. 23.

40 Boris T. Kolpakov, Vasilii D. Patrushev, *Biudzhetnyi vremeni gorodskogo naseleniia*, Moscow: Statistika, 1971, p. 212; Leonid A. Gordon, Eduard V. Klopov, Leon A. Onikov, *Cherty sotsialisticheskogo obraza zhizni: Byt gorodskikh rabochikh vchera, segodnia, zavtra*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Znanie, 1977, pp. 59-66, 149-150.

41 Rosemarie Rogers, “Normative Aspects of Leisure Time Behavior in the Soviet Union”, *Sociology and Social Research* 58, 1974, pp. 369-379; Gordon, Klopov, Onikov, *Cherty sotsialisticheskogo obraza zhizni*, p. 151; Firsov, “Srednego zritel'ia net”, p. 43.

42 Rozalina V. Ryvkina, *Obraz zhizni sel'skogo naseleniia: Metodologiya, metodika i rezul'taty izucheniia sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh aspektov zhiznedeiatel'nosti*, Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo “Nauka” Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1979, pp. 215-216.

TV programs had the power to integrate people with different backgrounds. Like radio but in contrast to the press, television was more likely to form a nationwide audience that could access the same information and entertainment services. My sample of ethnic Russian interviewees shows two important aspects: First, the memories of the respondents reveal a tendency towards pop-cultural homogenization as people often mentioned the same films and series regardless of their educational background. But the interviews also make clear that media usage and the evaluation of media contents remained socially diverse until the end of the Soviet Union.

### TV Consumption as a Source of Emotional Commitment

The TV set became the symbol of a retreat into privacy in all socialist states. The interviews demonstrate how people made use of the opportunity to reshape their private space by means of TV. Essentially, hardly anybody perceived him or herself as a “victim” of propaganda. On the contrary, some described the perception of Soviet TV programs very enthusiastically. Others stressed that they were able to acquire a critical media competence because of the social milieu they were embedded in. The conversations with family and friends became part of the ‘normalization’ in which viewers basically accepted TV’s representations of the ‘normal life’ in series, late night or game shows. This ‘normalization’ was a political process sustaining the socio-political order.<sup>43</sup>

43 See for a more differentiated argumentation Bönker, *Brave New World?* (forthcoming 2018) and for a similar argument Neringa Klumbytė, “Political Intimacy: Power, Laughter, and Coexistence in Late Soviet Lithuania”, *East European Politics and Societies* 25/4, 2011, pp. 658-677.

TV changed the mixture of private and public spheres, of private and public communication strategies. The new experiences of sound and images, of bridging the gap between space and time, of bringing public affairs to private homes gave TV viewers the opportunity to inscribe personal meanings to the acquired information. The regime set the ideological framework for these interpretation processes, although it was not able to fully control them. Viewers could simply turn off their TV sets. However, most of them did actually not do that, as *Liudmila* described representing many women: "Coming back home, you turn on the TV set; while you are running and taking care of your housekeeping, you are always keeping an eye on the telly."<sup>44</sup>

Even those of my interviewees who presented themselves as critical media consumers never basically rejected Soviet television. *Elena* recalled it as a "source of information" adding that "it was a small window showing the world."<sup>45</sup> Many narratives demonstrate that people had felt more entertained in Soviet times compared to Russian television today. The retrospective construction of Soviet TV consumption is certainly influenced by current watching practices. However, the merging of different time layers might be understood as the way the respondents come to terms with their Soviet media usage. In the light of the current media situation most of the respondents offered ambivalent, partly very positive, partly very critical assessments of Soviet TV's entertainment and information services. Those, who saw themselves as criti-

cal-reserved Soviet media users, distinguished between news, documentary features, and entertainment programs. With regard to entertainment, they clearly tended to dismiss today's programs in comparison to the Soviet one. They described the development of the last twenty years as "*Americanisation*" and commercialization. In their view these characteristics clearly denoted a deterioration of television's entertainment qualities. The academic *Iurii*<sup>46</sup>, whom I quote as a representative of this standpoint, was very interested in this topic. He remarked:

*Television, surely, was not like ours [i.e. today's], not independent, but purer. [...] But the Russian language was flawless. What you sometimes hear today is terrible. [...] Of course, mass media have changed. Not to grumble and to be discontent – what is possible today, that was not possible in the Soviet Union, of course, including bad things. This is in the first place. In the second, certainly, let's say, regarding the television as the most far-reaching mass media, I regret the loss of certain substance [...], if you wish a fine aesthetic content. They aired artistic productions that, in contrast to today, in most cases also offered further information and food for the mind. [...] And, indeed, all, who prefer more substance and thoughtful things, could no longer count on television. One probably has to get used to it. Because when I traveled to the West for the first time, I turned to television there. I was overwhelmed then by the 20 channels, whereas we had only 3 or 4, I don't remember. But I then already saw that you also could actually watch nothing there. Although I did not understand the language, I understood that it was some crock of shit. And we very strongly and very well adopt this crock of shit with the western style of mass media.... The mass media have changed. Some infor-*

44 The interview was conducted by Elena Bogdanova in St. Petersburg in November 2010. *Liudmila* was born in 1942 in Leningrad and received mid-level education.

45 The interview was conducted by Elena Bogdanova in St. Petersburg in November 2010. *Elena* was born in 1961 in Leningrad and graduated from university.

46 Interview with *Iurii* (born in 1938, Leningrad) by Elena Bogdanova, October 2010.



*mation that could be broadcast today was taboo in the Soviet Union.*<sup>47</sup>

Rather compliant, content, and partly indifferent viewers often criticized the amount of advertising today. Others, like *Liudmila*, who was also a content, compliant Soviet viewer, complained about ubiquitous violence on television today. Many of the respondents – even some of the critical and reserved ones – grasped Soviet TV as a representative of a superior Soviet popular culture in contrast to western representations.

The feeling of being rather well entertained in Soviet times supposedly had a consensus-building impact on what was the good Soviet lifestyle. Television framed potentially politicizing depictions of western-style consumption or utopian promises of Soviet consumption in films or documentaries. This new politicization of leisure time went hand in hand with the promise to live a good and cultural life in the future USSR.<sup>48</sup> The regime benefited from the fact that it was easier to provide media products than consumer goods. The interviews reveal that television supported viewers' common appreciation of Soviet films, thus evoking a predominantly affirmative emotional commitment to the Soviet life – at least retrospectively. Even if this kind of commitment does not necessarily imply a positive assessment of the political system, TV played a vital role in propagating the Communist utopia of abundance. Some respondents confirmed the rise of an "imagined community" based on an attractive vision of the future.<sup>49</sup> TV

seemed to have 'normalized' this metaphoric promise of a coming paradise.<sup>50</sup> It influenced at least less critical, rather content, or even compliant viewers who enjoyed television as a medium of entertainment. Such a media user was *Svetlana Vladimirovna*. Born in 1947, she received mid-level technical education, and still lives in Samara, formerly Kuibyshev. When asked if any communist utopias were broadcast, she affirmed that the medium told the viewers: "It will be like that, we will rear the calves and everyone will eat meat."<sup>51</sup> She found the narrative of future affluence convincing. Soviet films appealingly represented what she called "our future normal life". She was not the only one to mention that she also loved to watch imported films from western capitalist states. Looking back to the past, the respondents did not interpret these films as beyond reach but embedded them in their everyday imagination, so that they might have even become a positive symbol of the new Soviet lifestyle. This effect is interesting as Nikita Khrushchev's proclamation to overtake America made consumption a central factor in legitimizing the Soviet regime. From then on, private consumption practices belonged to the core themes on which the Soviet regime invited people to communicate.<sup>52</sup>

All this becomes even more comprehensible if we consider the regime's cultural policies. After Stalin's death, Soviet propaganda urged a shift towards new emotional qualities of the

*and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics*, Cambridge: University Press, 2011, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Bren argues that screening produced 'imagined communities': "This cult of the television serial produced a nation that regularly sat down in front of the small screen." Cf. Bren, *The Greengrocer*, pp. 122–129 (quote p. 129).

<sup>51</sup> The interview took place in September 2010 in Samara.

<sup>52</sup> Stephan Merl, "Konsum in der Sowjetunion: Element der Systemstabilisierung?", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 58, 2007, pp. 519–536; Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen".

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a male respondent (born in 1938, Leningrad, higher education), October 2010.

<sup>48</sup> See with regard to the CSSR, Bren, *The Greengrocer*, pp. 173–174.

<sup>49</sup> Only recently, Graeme Gill argued that the Soviet regime tried to gain legitimacy and to generate a collective identity by making people believe in the coming of a golden age. See Graeme Gill, *Symbols*

Soviet way of life. These partly very normative demands became influential starting in the late 1960s.<sup>53</sup> Private emotions became a new matter of public interest. This was especially due to the fact that the regime recognized television's power to evoke a good mood and an affirmative commitment among viewers towards their Soviet life. Christine Evans draws our attention to the late-night talk show *Ot vseï dushi* (*From the Bottom of My Heart*). First aired in 1972 and hosted by Valentina Leont'eva, a still warmly remembered star of Central Television, viewers identified the show with conveying the "Soviet way of life" and deciphered its emotionality. Represented by Leont'eva's face and her distinctive voice, the show shaped an "emotional community" in front of the screens, as Evans calls it.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

As a popular consumer good, television transformed Soviet households' material culture and lifestyle. People spent an increasing amount of time in front of the screen. Television became a distinctive part of changing communication practices within the private realm, as well as between people and the regime. People gained new opportunities to

shape their private lives, to discover personal emotions and relationships. Television interconnected time and space in a new way and helped to constitute the Soviet audience as 'emotional communities'. All of this made many people ascribe positive meanings to their 'Soviet' lifestyles. People's investment in the private sphere bolstered the regime. Oral history interviews show that positive memories of former Soviet life are no rarity today. They prompt us to consider the affirmative ascriptions bearing witness to former cohesive factors within Soviet society. The stability of the social and political setting in the Brezhnev era may have derived to a great extent from these stable 'emotional communities' molded in front of the TV screen.

Shortly before the Russian-Ukrainian crisis evolved, Ukrainian historian Katerina Khinkulova argued that today's Russian television culture is still much more shaped by traces of the Soviet popular culture than the Ukrainian. As the main reason she stated different attitudes towards the past. Whereas the Russian TV is much more nostalgia-driven and clings to an idea of a high-quality Soviet TV culture including predominantly films and formats of the 1970s, the latter followed western trends of reality TV to become part of a "West European" popular culture.<sup>55</sup> These trends tell us much about TV producers' perception of their audiences and the political settings. They also witness the persistent Russian thinking about a superior Soviet popular culture in contrast to western mass culture. Many of my respondents would have agreed with this.<sup>56</sup>

However, today's highly complex interplay

53 Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007; Neringa Klumbytė, "Soviet Ethical Citizenship: Morality, the State, and Laughter in Late Soviet Lithuania", *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, eds. Neringa Klumbytė and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 91-116; Larisa Honey, "Pluralizing Practices in Late-Socialist Moscow: Russian Alternative Practitioners Reclaim and Redefine Individualism", *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, eds. Neringa Klumbytė and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 117-142.

54 See the intriguing piece by Christine Evans, "The 'Soviet Way of Life' as Way of Feeling: Emotion and Influence on Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev Era", *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 56/2-3, 2015, pp. 543-69.

55 Kateryna Khinkulova, "Hello, Lenin? Nostalgia on Post-Soviet Television in Russia and Ukraine", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1/2, 2012, pp. 94-104.

56 See for more Bönker, *Brave New World?* (forthcoming 2018).

of producers' perceptions of the audience, the expectations of the viewers towards the program, the financing of the TV stations, interests of advertisers etc. could not directly be linked to 'ordinary' citizen's historical experiences and consciousness without further ado. Nevertheless, the interviews reveal that people's representations of Soviet television are a still persistent source of emotional commitment to the former Soviet life. Soviet viewing habits are regularly updated, because Russian television steadily repeats Soviet films and series. This strategy surely nourishes nostalgic yearning for the allegedly Soviet cultural and probably even political superiority.

It is worth noting that even retrospectively critical and reserved viewers reveal an affirmative emotional attitude towards Soviet lifestyle. They at least did not simply identify media content with false propaganda. As television was embedded in a complex communication structure, we could not conclude from watching practices that it became a coffin nail of the Soviet regime. On the contrary, it provided a specific entertainment culture that supported living together, of the political, economic, and

social order to concrete figures presented on the screen. It thus not only shaped specific Soviet lifestyle to many groups of Soviet society. Television tended to reduce complex questions of the regime's claim of guaranteeing a decent Soviet chronotopes but also specific Soviet lifestyles.

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# Soviet Television and Popular Mass Culture in the 1960s

by Kristian Feigelson

## Abstract

In the 1960s, cinema was the most appreciated entertainment for a multicultural Soviet audience. In contrast, television was rather considered a propaganda tool. And yet, during the Thaw, television appears to have expressed an atmosphere of hope. Despite the heritage of Agitprop and the tradition of using visual media as a political weapon, television became the medium of the everyday life.

**Keywords:** agitprop, cinema, entertainment, everyday life, popular culture, television.

After Soviet television was widely established in the 1950s, it helped to legitimize a new culture of images in the USSR from the 1960s onward. Prior to this, mass political education through cinema became a central aspect of the Bolshevik policy during the revolutionary period, even though they failed until the 1930s to organize cinema as an effective propaganda weapon.

How was it possible to rebuild a new popular mass culture after the Second World War? Television eventually became a new weapon, able to educate but also to entertain. The so called “cultural revolution” (1928-1932) had altered the face of the previous mass culture once and for all.<sup>1</sup> Collectivization and industrialization almost destroyed the popular culture on an ancestral and rural basis, as the intelligentsia was eradicated and peasant culture almost ceased to exist during the Stalinist era. After the 1960s, a large urban audience focused on television was able to support the aims of this new audio-visual culture. Television made this popular culture accessible to most citizens and a larger audience. Yet it was not an easy task, as Soviet mass culture operated under a double burden: television had to both edify and entertain. Its role was more to inspire than to report the truth, as citizens were asked to identify with these Soviet

values. This new mass culture was supposed to show how this audience made their lives more fulfilling: workers and peasants devoted to the national economy, mothers and fathers devoted to their families, simple heroes devoted to the Soviet Union, their homeland.<sup>2</sup>

State television of the Communist Party State became a showcase for every kind of experimentation. From 1960 on, it was an essential socializing tool for propagating mass popular culture values. Popular culture remains a difficult term expressing an even more difficult concept. After the era of the cinema Agitprop movement (1917-1921), popular culture was in theory a set of rural, national and religious values that supposedly persisted in the peasantry and in rural locales. In reality, the farmers and peasants were being wiped out by famines in the countryside, especially in Ukraine, religion and the bedrock attachment to Orthodoxy fell victim to the atheism of the Bolsheviks and the confiscation of church property. The end of the decade (1929-1940) heralded Stalin’s policy of “liquidation of the kulaks as a class,” followed by the forced collectivization of agriculture, which decimated the peasantry. In the cities, forced marshalling and labor slavery quashed any hopes for the development of an urban folk culture. Popular culture, as presently understood, is distinctly

1 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia (1928-1931)*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

2 Kristin Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR”, *Slavic Review* 66/2, 2007, pp. 278-306.





Figure 1: Old TV tower in Shabolovka street, Moscow.  
Private collection Carmen Scheide

urban, far from the rural values connected to the traditional folk culture: industrialization, mass media, social mobility and other forces have changed the whole notion of popular culture in the Soviet Union. An everyday art, television was by turns political, pedagogical, and entertaining, at once giving a new image of society, an ideal and the arena of every debate taking place in the USSR.<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s and 80s there was a brief renaissance of writ-

<sup>3</sup> I conducted this research first in the USSR in the mid-1970s, then after the publication of a book on

ers and filmmakers who glorified rural and national values, but it never developed into a nationwide movement. Soviet television was infrequently explored during the 1960s and 1970s, except from the angle of television as a propaganda instrument and an apparatus of the Party-State, an approach which neglected any deep understanding of its effects.<sup>4</sup> As little as ten years after the emergence of the technology, Soviet society was being televised on a huge scale. Soviet culture in the framework of a multinational empire, claimed for the first time the ability to describe the whole of reality at a time when this false ethnic harmony composed of 108 different peoples, among whom Russians only accounted for 54.65 per cent in 1959, was fragmented and undermined by the enforced exile of entire nations.<sup>5</sup> In conjunction with the whole Soviet cultural production, television played a major and significant role in reshaping this society during the Thaw years (1954-1967) when cinema also contributed on a more critical level to these visual practices.<sup>6</sup> However, because of its power of

this subject: Kristian Feigelson, *L'URSS et sa télévision*, Seyssel: INA/Champ Vallon, 1990. This volume was based on a research project on television conducted at EHESS/Paris to observe the Perestroika through Soviet television in the late 1980s, cf. chapter "La Télévision Soviétique à l'Heure de la Glasnost", *Culture et Révolution*, eds. Marc Ferro and Sheila Fitzpatrick, Paris: Ehes, 1989, pp. 167-183.

<sup>4</sup> Mark W. Hopkins, *Mass-media in the Soviet Union*, New York: Pegasus, 1970; Georges Mond, *La Télévision et les Masses*, Paris: La Documentation Française, 1970; Ellen Propper-Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, New York: Praeger, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> The last census of January 1959 in André De Moura, "Nationalités et cultures nationales en URSS", *Population* 18/1, 1963, pp. 144-148. See also on this matter Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below*, London, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> The so-called Thaw is a period of ambiguities (1954-1967) and referred to the novel of Ehrenburg *Ottepel* (1954). Cf. "Le XXème Congrès et la culture", *La Revue Russe* 28 (2006); as well as the visit of Khrushchev to the USA in 1959. Cf. William Taubman, *Khrushchev and His Era*, New York: Norton, 2003, pp. 396-441.

manipulation to affect viewers and to impress on them new images, television became the most important tool of the Soviet State, with the goal of creating “homo Sovieticus,” the new Soviet man.<sup>7</sup> Television held the potential to fulfil the longstanding dream of a Soviet New Man delivered directly to every home. It offered a compelling symbol of a modern new Soviet “way of life” in which new consumers embraced this nascent medium and played an essential role in its promotion after the 1960s. How can we revisit television’s origins and its role in the consolidation of a new mass culture, which since the Thaw of the Cold War has served as a force of cohesion for the greater Soviet population? Our research is inscribed in a theoretical social science framework, but makes use of numerous field surveys conducted on this subject in the past. How can we examine television as a vector of a specific mass culture in order to understand the social appropriation of audio-visual culture in the USSR?

This will prove of particular importance for the period after 1960, when the cinema often provides an alternative critique, while the gradually reforming USSR, exhausted after the Stalinist era, begins to put new resources into play for popular entertainment.<sup>8</sup> Cultural questions were a significant area of discussions in the 1960s after the long darkness of the Stalinist period, but Soviet power still gave its determination to control them. Compared to the role played by cinema at this time, in doing what literature under strict control could not accomplish, television appears to be con-

servative. Its central administrators failed to manipulate adequately the televised image as requested, despite the energetic debates within the society. Television, then, becomes an essential apparatus, despite being continually ill-perceived and poorly controlled. The authorities at first seemed to encourage the critics but then moved back to regain control. They subsequently faced criticism mainly from other printed media. For millions of new audience members, however, television has become a kind of new art of the everyday, for it falls under the category of *byt* (everyday life), a new, specifically Soviet lifestyle, connecting the collective values of real socialism with the emergence of a more individualistic mind-set that is promoted by television. New viewers or consumers wanted entertainment and as in other many countries television offered a distraction from the difficulties of daily life. Our task is therefore to revisit this audio-visual industry, which reflects the complexities of many other questions undergoing major evolutions after the fall of the USSR, the region’s entry into globalization later, and the emergence of other cultural industries.<sup>9</sup>

### Visual culture of the 1960s

The 1960s are marked by a changing preference for television over radio as a means to transmit political messages. In 1960, the state was forced to take up television with a kind of urgency: the USSR had to show its citizens an image of a world where the progress of so-

7 Cf. Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

8 Kristian Feigelson (ed.), *Caméra Politique: Cinéma et Stalinisme*, Théorème 8, Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2005; Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, New York: IB Tauris, 2000.

9 In a comparative perspective and further developments on these topics in the era of globalisation, see Kristian Feigelson and Iakov Ioskievitch, “Russie: un paysage chaotique et innovant”, *Dossiers de l’Audiovisuel* 94, 2000; *Mediakul’tura Novoi Rossii*, A.B Kirillova (dir.), Moskva: Akadem. izd., 2007. Cf. Kristian Feigelson, *Le Cinéma Russe Aujourd’hui*, Moscou: Regards de l’Observatoire franco-russe, 2014, <http://obsfr.ru/fr/le-rapport-annuel.html>.

cialism was no longer a matter of doubt. This image would appear in multiple, progressive incarnations. Television reports will offer visible and tangible proof of these “national realities” and of the march toward “a radiant future.” The year 1960 sees the proliferation of live broadcasts of model workers. Television played a role in Soviet citizens’ civic education; it bases its entire strategy on the fight against laziness and parasitism. Television did not however enjoy a particularly privileged status. Visual media remained “for internal usage” as the USSR did not yet have many cultural exchanges with the West. From the mid-1950s through the end of the Soviet period, Indian films were immensely popular with Soviet audiences, compensating for the lack of American movies during the Cold War.<sup>10</sup> With the end of Stalinist isolation and the rise of a television culture that broadcasts new movies, Soviet cinema benefited too from exposure to a wider world. In this case, despite its control, television was still regarded with some suspicion by the Soviet authorities, who only wished to see it as an instrument for entertainment.

By 1965, these antiquated conceptions were already irrelevant. The Soviets realized that they were lagging behind compared to the United States and demanded a better analysis of programming. Traditional ideology was replaced by other new functions based on entertainment.<sup>11</sup> This institutionalization occurred progressively. Within a decade, thanks to a

concentration of technical resources in large urban centers, a rationalization for the installation of television networks was reached: television must cover all space and reach all categories of people on a continent-wide scale. The 1960s had seen the creation of a Committee for Radio and Television (*Gosteleradio*), subordinate to the *Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Soveta Ministrov SSSR* and the launch of about 160 television studios. The Ostankino-Moscow complex, chosen by these political elites, was the symbol of this centralized, technical development able to recruit new young generations of professionals well trained at the VGIK (*Vsesovetskii gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii*) film school.<sup>12</sup> This spatial territorialization by means of audio-visual media was the object of a Party resolution in January 1960: *O dal'neishem Razvitii Sovetskogo televideniia* (*On the future development of Soviet television*). This act affirmed the need for further program development, arguing from the perspective of “the ideological struggle against capitalist countries” and of “Socialist education of the masses.”<sup>13</sup> Television has since then become the favourite medium of the State, despite the fact that members of the State Committee for Radio and Television underestimated the major changes that had taken place in Soviet society since the 1950s.

On April 19, 1962, the State Committee for Radio and Television was placed under the aegis of the Ministers’ Council without changing its personnel as a bureaucratic restructuration. The technicians and those in charge of

10 Cf. Sudha Rajagopalan, *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Cf. Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010.

11 Which reminds us of the birth of another culture of entertainment in the 1930s, cf. Richard Taylor, “Boris Shumiatskii and the Soviet Cinema in the 1930s: Ideology as Mass Entertainment”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 6, 1986, pp. 48-54.

12 Cf. Kristian Feigelson and Clara Darmon, “Le VGIK: Une Ecole de Cinéma à Moscou”, *Can We Learn Cinema – Knowledge, Training and Profession*, co-ed. Martina Panelli, XIX International Film Studies Conference, University of Udine, March 2013, pp. 29-41.

13 *O dal'neishem Razvitii Sovetskogo televideniia*, Party Resolution January 1960 Moscow, in: *Pravda*, January 1960.

programming are from this moment a part of the same state organism. Though programs remain relatively specialized, this act achieved a unification of television's technique and content to control it in a better and centralized way. Television was called upon to promote political unity in a society wherein many national debates are still thorny. By incorporating non-Russian entities, the policy of Russification that began well before 1917 was intended, after World War II, to realize the dream of a unified Soviet empire; television had to bring the "harmony of the total State" into reality. At the beginning of the 1960s, almost 10 million television sets were sold to a nationwide audience of 40 million; however, these social innovations did nothing to quell criticism aimed at the medium. Conformity was still the order of the day. Take, for example, this comment on Soviet television by an American journalist:

*When not making a feature film, the Russians are content to film a theatrical play, a round-table discussion, a concert or a dance recital, as if the function of this mode of expression could be reduced to rendering visible what was previously only heard and read... Everything is filmed head-on, without using camera angles or lighting to create movement and surprise, without any sense of the specific language that constitutes television.*<sup>14</sup>

The programs' absorption of ideology, along with their technical failures, explain television's weak performance. Certain filmmakers who contributed to the birth of post-war Soviet cinema remained reluctant to experiment in television. An overall framework was still

missing, and the programs' quality showed as much. Criticism accumulated in the press, which only encouraged an increased rigidity of top-down media control.

Many viewers complained about the quality of the television sets and the difficulty of repairing them or obtaining new parts. Nikita Khrushchev echoed a common lament in his report to the Central Committee in November 1962:

*The manufacture of television screens is allotted to 19 businesses spread across different towns. In 1962, 12 models were issued but differed from each other only in color and size. The multiplicity of the models and the excessive dispersion of the factories prevent the lowering of the price and, worse, an amelioration of quality.*<sup>15</sup>

After 1960, television shows focusing on the everyday began to appear: children's programs, such as *Grandma Television's Tales* (*Skazki babuchkini*); women's programs, such as *For You Women* (*Zhenshchiny*); and for farmers, shows such as *Conferences on Wheat Cultivation* (*Po sel'skhoziazistvo*). Shows judged tedious or unconvincing were quickly set aside, as journalists saw their roles rehabilitated from that of mere propagandist to entertainer.

### "Interactive programs"

Television began to adopt organizational tools such as surveys, discussions with audiences, collective screenings, and televised contests. "Interactive" programs appeared, including *With All My Heart, Countrymen* (*Serdechenno kolchozniki*) and *Kontakt* (*Kontakt*), which re-

<sup>14</sup> Maria Mannes, "Essay on Soviet Television", *New York Magazine*, March 5, 1961. During the Cuban missile crisis (1962), American media were covering different aspects of daily life in the Soviet Union. Cf. William Taubman, *Khrushchev and His Era*, New York: Norton, 2003, chapter 19.

<sup>15</sup> *O Razvitií teledeniia*, November 1962. Cf. Kristian Feigelson, *L'URSS et Sa Télévision*, Paris: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel / Champ Vallon, Seyssel, 1990.



sponded to audience letters. One of the main goals of 1960s television was to associate watching television with collective action. This new approach to television programs gradually brought forth a few changes, transforming television into a genuine forum, despite the fact that it remained a dependable, cowed propaganda instrument of the regime. However, to some extent, television became a critical tool of a new type of social control step-by-step.

At the same time, in this supposedly unified and internally reconciled society, television's differentiated programming divided audiences into categories. This pigeon-holing contradicts *Sovetskaia Kul'tura's* rhapsody:

*Television has united the schoolboy and his grandmother, the mathematician father and the school-teacher mother. Television has reconciled tastes and satisfies varied demands and diverse intellectual needs.*<sup>16</sup>

The public became more and more compartmentalized. Images were categorized by their intended audience's age, sensitivity, and activity. Television created an image of Soviet society that is much more fragmented than egalitarian, with different programs aimed at different categories of viewers (soldiers, teachers, workers, engineers...<sup>17</sup>

From this moment, television embraced all aspects of the everyday. Programs diversified and became less "political" and more "cultural", even though the ideological basis of fashioning the "New Man" was not forgotten. Formal references to Lenin's writings on the role of the revolutionary press did not lose

their place. On August 11, 1962, the first live satellite Vostok-3 transmission evinced a two-fold effort: to spread the knowledge of Soviet progress in space exploration and to usher in a new era of the moving image in the USSR. Television was no longer simply a propaganda tool for the Party; however, images were still shown selectively, even parsimoniously: "images of the farm, of the kombinat belong to a reality in motion." Adapting certain montage techniques from the 1920s, depictions of kolkhozy in 1960 were meant to remedy the effects of "bourgeois propaganda"<sup>18</sup>. Every day, the media showed socialism's advantages over capitalism, reflecting "the harmonious development of the USSR and its success in constructing socialism."<sup>19</sup> Every year on May 7, *Radio day* (called *Den' Radio*), which took place on the day on which in 1895, Alexander Popov successfully demonstrated his invention, the policy of the Party for the audio-visual sector was reaffirmed.

Nevertheless, content changed gradually, and new techniques appeared in the mid-sixties: interviews and live transmission on *Gorizont* (Horizon), aimed towards youth, and in series like *Slava geroiam truda* (Glory to the Working Heroes) and *Leninskii Al'bom* (The Leninist Album). Later, the televised investigation appeared in *Splav* (Alloy) or *Vzaimnaia anketa* (Common Inquiry). These shows presented scientific discoveries and their technical applications in factories, and end with a live discussion. Shows like *Priglasaem na iarmarku* (We Invite You to the Market) brought producers and consumers, specialists and the public, face to face over a specific common theme. Television now seemed ready to supplant radio in

16 R.A. Boretsky, "Kogda est' mnogo kanalov (When there are many channels)," *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, September 11, 1965, pp. 2-3.

17 Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

18 Peter Kenez, "Cultural Revolution in cinema" in *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*, London: IB Tauris, 2000, pp. 91-113.

19 *Partiinaia Zhizn'* 4, February 1960.

news coverage and the depiction of reality. On August 19, 1965, a *Pravda* editorial declared: "From television we expect complementary information and clear commentary, helping the public to better understand the context of events. Thanks to these visual techniques (film, snapshots, photos), television, unlike radio, has every opportunity to make contact with the viewer convincingly and sensitively, permitting him to discern the facts by showing them to him."<sup>20</sup>

Relations between the two media were not perceived at that time as competing, but as complementary. And yet, television was still only the "eye of radio", since it ventures out rarely on location and produces most of its material in the studio: "*Television isn't television when it speaks to viewers about important events without showing them*" was a sentiment frequently voiced around 1965.<sup>21</sup>

### A new mass culture

Toward the middle of the 1960s opinion turned more and more favorable toward the visual media. Television had to gain its independence and no longer be content to be an add-on to radio or a spokesperson of the printed press. However, the televised image was far from being completely mastered by the engineers. The divide between intentions and necessities seemed just as wide as ever. In addition, even if they could technically control the image at its source, producers had no concept of the impact of its broadcasting into millions of homes. In the past, the function of militant Agit-Prop in the 1920s was simply political and pedagogical, a matter of eliminating any possible doubt about the reality of socialism by means of the

image.<sup>22</sup> With television, the image's priority was to be a faithful mirror of reality, and only then as a showcase for social experimentation. Thus, the repetitive character of the programs on Soviet television was capable of threatening its own ideological foundations. In the 1960s, these programs reflected the legitimization of private emotions and lives in an emerging focus on ordinary people living everyday life.<sup>23</sup> The audience craved entertainment at a time when no mass culture audience could be forced to watch television. The State-Party needed its values legitimized by images, but Soviet mass culture needed accommodation, which encouraged diversity of opinion. Official mass culture monopolized the media. In the context of a post-Stalinist society, thanks to television, different new categories or interest groups were able to negotiate the consumption of a new visual mass culture and to express their personal views. Outsiders at this time imagined Soviet society to be uniform; however, despite official censorship, underground culture was lively, offering a constant commentary on this culture of homogeneity dominated by mass media. The content of this alternative culture mattered quite a lot, but its form counted far more because in the 1960s these people, "*the stiliagi*", paid particular attention to their style due to their belief that this generation should look different. Alternatives were few for those from society's margins in the post-Stalinist years, but they attracted great attention when *stiliagi* became

22 Cf. Kristian Feigelson, "L'Héroïsme Bolchévique: Entre Mythes et Représentations," *Héros et Super-héros au Cinéma*, Théorème 13, Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2009, pp. 19-29.

23 "In the early and mid-1960s, the situation has changed in spite of the official resistance to the ideologically unacceptable division between elite and mass cinema, in reality a body of B-grade movies developed, many made for television" in Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, New York: IB Tauris, 2000, p. 14.

20 *Pravda*, August 19, 1965. Anonymous editorial.

21 Ibid.

pioneers of the “unofficial culture”.<sup>24</sup> The Party had fewer options to impose new communist norms after 1956. The control provoked public dissent among some Party intellectuals, artists and filmmakers. They felt a new freedom to distinguish between the Party political authority, which they almost did not question, and the field of culture where they gained and prized a kind of new autonomy.

Cinema and radio were still the main universal media of that time. Western movies started to circulate in Eastern Europe and the cultural competition of the early Cold War years was asymmetrical. Soviet television had nothing with which to compete, while Radio Free Europe was broadcasting 3 hours of American popular music every day.<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of the 1960s, amid Soviet cinema’s post-Stalin renaissance – that of *Ivan’s Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*) by Andrei Tarkovskii in 1962, *The First Teacher* (*Pervyi Uchitel’*) by Andrei Konchalovskii in 1965, and *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (*Tini zabutikh predkiv*) by Sergei Paraianov in 1964 – television was rebuked for detracting from the cinema.<sup>26</sup> Going to the cinema was still a strong collective pleasure in this era in the Soviet Union. Studios complained of the devastating impact it had on movie-going. Meanwhile, the cinema in this period of Thaw was already playing the role of social critique. Other kinds of films, new values of the 1960s, less enthusiastic or collective than in the 1930s (with the Stalinist slogan *Life is get-*

*ting better*) but more individualistic, offered a chance of redemption. An unofficial popular cultural visual form flourished beneath the surface.<sup>27</sup> Culture was no longer a protected zone where everyone could get their instructions from above except in the fields of the media, where despite this new freedom everything was still subordinate to politics. Television productions, however, were criticized for their lack of ideology by letters received from the viewers. The press, Party leaders, and the public complained about television’s uninteresting, over-serious, and insufficiently diverse programming. The correspondence among members of the audience, which was now permitted, assumed a definite influence. However, we still cannot speak of “public opinion”, which was still a rather vague notion in the USSR (*obshchestvennost’*).<sup>28</sup>

The second half of the 1960s saw crucial gains for the audio-visual field in the USSR. Televised material was culturally integrated at last. The social functions of television diversified, and more rigid audience sectors were formed. Television obeyed conventions that had come to be socially recognized. The budget allotted to the television industry rose from 54.8 million rubles in 1961-1965 to more than 140 million in 1966-1970. By March 1969, 124 million Soviets in over 70 percent of the territory could receive television signals, and ten years later the number climbed to 200 million. Distorted transmissions between the cit-

24 Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism, 1945-1956*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

25 Tony Judt, *Postwar, a History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin, 2005, New-York, pp. 224-225.

26 Cf. Birgit Beumers, “The Thaws: New Beginnings, New Lives (1954-1966)”, *A History of Russian Cinema*, Oxford: Berg, 2009, pp. 112-145. Cf. Kristian Feigelson, “Le Cinéma Soviétique du Dégel, l’Ennemi Transfiguré”, *La Libération en Europe (1945-2005)*, eds. Christian Delporte and Denis Maréchal, Paris: INA/L’Harmattan, 2006, pp. 404-418.

27 Cf. Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; James von Geldern and Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

28 Cf. Kristian Feigelson, “Médias et opinions en Europe centrale”, *Télérevolutions Culturelles*, ed. Kristian Feigelson / Nicolas Pelissier, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998, pp. 47-57. Cf. Boris Firsov, *Televidenie glazami sotsiologa*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971; L.A. Gordon & E.V. Klopov, *Chelovek posle raboty*, Moscow: Progress, 1976.

ies and the country decreased. With 98 sets for every 100 families, televisions became one of the first purchases of Soviet households. The USSR gradually developed and consolidated a new media culture able to give an emblematic image of the society.<sup>29</sup>

I explore the shift in the changing mythologies of Soviet culture in order to emphasize the complexity of this new visual culture and its impact on the ordinary lives of Soviet citizens. Thanks to television, the regime could reinforce its monopoly on culture production and broadcast it widely. Soviet culture indeed became a new mass media culture in the sense that it was shared and consumed by the vast majority of society, even though it was fundamentally different from western mass culture. Yet in that case, more attention should be paid to the question of the audience, the viewers and how they reacted.<sup>30</sup> In the 1960s, the Soviet system had finally settled on its own visual machinery to complement its multistoried propaganda frames, its banners, its Leninist parades, etc. From the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s, a particular period of Soviet history, including the ideological revision of the system, this new visual culture was able to juxtapose reality with images for a large and popular audience. Unknown at the beginning of Soviet history, the media gradually became a way of life and the voice of fundamental change. Until the collapse of the Soviet system, where television also played a major role spreading

news and forbidden images, the ascendance of television in the mid-sixties was the driving force of a new culture of mass entertainment. This visual mass culture could reach the mass audience only by compromising its audiences' tastes.<sup>31</sup> The *Homo Cathodicus* (a "new TV addict") defined a new *Homo Sovieticus* split between collective solution and individual desires. Paradoxically, through this communist public space, television symbolized the expansion of privacy. Viewers were able or unable to re-appropriate these Soviet values in the intimacy of their homes. After the 1960s, television tried daily to promote and articulate these Soviet values while meeting the expectations of this new audience: during this period de-Sovietization and westernization had not yet profoundly affected the roots of the Soviet system as they did later in the mid-1980s. Later, in the Perestroika years of 1986-1990, television contributed paradoxically to the collapse of the Soviet Union, mobilizing a large part of the population by means of the small screen to take part in frank debates about the vast changes in and the final fall of the USSR.<sup>32</sup> It may be the case that the Perestroika from 1986 further refined the approaches of the sixties. This visual mass culture doubtlessly helped to maintain the Soviet system from the 1960s, but

29 Alexander Zinoviev, *Les Hauteurs béantes*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977.

30 How are these cultural contents spread in a Soviet environment? How can we fill the gap in our knowledge about popular resistance toward these images and messages promoted by Soviet television and by this official culture? Soviet mass culture contained its own conflicts and was also a mixture of contents negotiated from above and from below. Cf. Gabor Rittersporn, "Qui lit la Pravda?", *Le Débat* 2 (juin 1980). In a comparative manner, cf. Paul Yonnet, *Jeux, Mode et Masses: La Société Française et le Moderne 1945-1985*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985.

31 Even though the most popular movies stars in the USSR were American since the 1920s, from Douglas Fairbanks to Mary Pickford. Concerning the questions of stars and heroes in early Soviet Cinema, Kristian Feigelson, "L'Héroïsme Bolchevique".

32 Marc Ferro, *Les Origines de la Perestroïka*, Paris: Ramsay, 1990. On this subject cf. *Culture and the Media in the USSR Today*, eds. Julian Graffy and Geoffrey A. Hosking, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989; Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media*, London: Routledge, 1991; *Mass Culture and Perestroika in the Soviet Union*, ed. Marsha Siefert, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Victoria E. Bonnel and Gregory Freidin, "Televorot: The Role of Television Coverage in Russia's August 1991 Coup", *Soviet Hieroglyphics*, ed. Nancy Condee, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 22-51; Tristan Mattelard, *Le Cheval de Troie de l'Audiovisuel*, Grenoble: PUG, 1995.



in the end its role in society was much more complex and unpredictable, as mentioned during this period in this last anecdote: On television, Comrade Rabinovich raised his hand in favor of all Party resolutions. Since he was raising his hand so energetically, Nikita Sergeevich asked him: "Don't you have any of your own personal ideas?" "Yes, Nikita Sergeevich, but I don't agree with them!"<sup>33</sup>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<sup>33</sup> "Soviet socialism was not the inflexible ideology it claimed to be: it was a set of social practices and cultural inclinations in constant flux, which hid its intentions not only from the outside world but from itself", in James von Geldern and Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*, p. 17.

# Seventeen Moments of Spring, a Soviet James Bond Series? Official Discourse, Folklore, and Cold War Culture in Late Socialism

by Isabelle de Keggel

## Abstract

The Soviet television mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* is one of the most important products of popular culture in the USSR. In the Cold War context, viewers considered the series' main character Stirlitz as an alternative to the western hero James Bond. Although the mini-series was produced in the 1970s, it communicates values that are close to Stalin-era patterns. While ordinary Soviet citizens criticized the numerous weaknesses about Stirlitz, they never questioned the underlying communist ideology in the numerous anecdotes.

**Keywords:** television mini-series, Soviet Cold War culture, values, anecdotes.

The Soviet television mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (*Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny*, 1973) is remarkable in several ways. First of all, it represents one of the most important products of official popular culture in the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, it was instigated through institutions of the Party state and thus was part of the Soviet hegemonic discourse. On the other, it was a product of popular culture through its format, which was intended to affect the masses.<sup>2</sup> The series' extraordinary popularity is also remarkable. Within a very short time, *Seventeen Moments'* reception took on a cult character and it must be seen as one of the most successful productions in the history of Soviet television. This cult status is demonstrated, for example, in the cycle of anecdotes that developed from it, which is one of the largest from the Soviet era. Finally, the series represents a significant caesura in Soviet cultural history. As Stephen Lovell

has convincingly demonstrated, *Seventeen Moments* marks the end of the Thaw and the beginning of 1970s culture because the new genre of the miniseries was "the major mass cultural innovation, and the quintessential cultural form, of the 1970s".<sup>3</sup> He argues that it stood for the emergence of a mass culture whose chief medium was the television and that could be experienced by the public simultaneously in real time. Furthermore, it represented a national culture that no longer included any kind of internationalist intentions.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this article is to shed light on two questions: Why can *Seventeen Moments* be seen as a part of official popular culture and which values did it propagate? And how was this proposal negotiated in the popular culture "from below", in the anecdotes told by average Soviet citizens in their everyday life?

It is already known that the series was filmed on order of the KGB with the goal of improving its image by depicting its contribution to victory in World War II.<sup>5</sup> The idea of producing

1 Elena Prokhorova, "The Post-Utopian Body Politic: Masculinity and the Crisis of National Identity in Brezhnev-Era TV Miniseries," *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth Century Russian Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006, pp. 131-150, here p. 135.

2 In terms of the Second World War theme, this format remained an exception, probably due to concerns that the accompanying trivialization could not do justice to the topic. Birgit Beumers, "The Serialization of the War," *Kinokultura* 12, 2006, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/12-beumers.shtml>, accessed 23 September 2012.

3 Stephen Lovell, "In Search of an Ending: Seventeen Moments and the Seventies," *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2013, p. 307.

4 Lovell, *In Search*, pp. 305, 307, 317.

5 Mark Lipovetskii, "Iskusstvo alibi: Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny v svete nashego opyta," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 3, 2007, <http://magazines.>

a series on the topic came from Andropov himself, who was head of the secret services at the time. He commissioned his deputy Tsvigun to advise and oversee work on it. The Central Committee also supported the series and provided an adviser.<sup>6</sup> A novel by the author Julian Semenov, who enjoyed close ties to the KGB, provided a model for the twelve-part series.<sup>7</sup> During filming, director Tatiana Lioznova undertook extensive changes to the original and showed a good feel for what the public would like.<sup>8</sup>

[russ.ru/nz/2007/3/li16.html](http://russ.ru/nz/2007/3/li16.html), accessed December 20, 2012. In the context of Soviet film history, it was not unusual that the secret service advised *Seventeen Moments*. Many successful television series were curated by the KGB with the goal of spreading a positive image of the service. Other famous examples of this PR strategy, which can be characterized as a "KGB popular culture", were *Neulovimye mstiteli* (*The Elusive Avengers*, 1966), *Adiutant ego prevoskhoditel'stva* (*The Adjutant Of His Excellency*, 1970) and *TASS upolnomochen zaiavit'* (*TASS Is Authorized To Declare*, 1984, also starring Viacheslav Tikhonov, the main actor of *Seventeen Moments*). On two of these productions, see Elena Prokhorova, *Fragmented mythologies: Soviet TV-Series of the 1970s*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2003, pp. 64-80. Additionally, the Ministry of the Interior initiated or promoted films made to improve the image of the Militsiia, the Soviet police. The most famous examples of this are the television series *Sledstvie vedut znatoki* (*Investigation Held By Experts*, 1971) and *Mesto vstrechi izmenit' nel'zia* (*Can the Meeting Place Be Changed?*, 1979, with the popular singer / actor Vladimir Vysotskii as protagonist; the idea for the production may have come from him). On this, see Serguei Alex. Oushakine, "Crimes of Substitution: Detection in Late Soviet Society," *Public Culture* 3, 2003, pp. 426-451 and Elena Prokhorova, "Can the Meeting Place Be Changed? Crime and Identity Discourse in Russian Television Series of the 1990s," *Slavic Review* 3, 2003, pp. 512-24, here 515-6. See also Aleksei Leonidovich Murav'ev, "Za tech, kto 'v pole': Geroi nezrimogo fronta na ekrane i v zhizni", *Trudy istoricheskogo fakul'teta Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta* 21, 2015, pp. 316-338.

6 Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 147, n. 11.

7 Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, "The Blockbuster Miniseries on Soviet TV: Isaev-Shtirlitz, the Ambiguous Hero of Seventeen Moments in Spring," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 29, 2002, pp. 257-276, here 259.

8 Marina Adamovich, "Ne dumai o „Mgnoveniach“ svysoka...", *Iskusstvo kino* 3, 2002, pp. 74-85, here p. 76.

The plot of the film focuses on seventeen chosen "moments" and is set between February 2 and March 24, 1945.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is placed just few months before Germany's capitulation and the collapse of the National Socialist system. The main character is the Soviet spy Maksim Isaev, who is working under the name Max von Stirlitz as an SS regiment leader in the Reich Main Security Office. He receives orders from Moscow to investigate rumors that the western Allies are negotiating a separate peace treaty with high-ranking Nazis. If the rumors are true, then he must undermine the negotiations. Stirlitz maintains contact with Moscow with the help of a Soviet couple in Berlin using the names Erwin and Käthe Kien, who operate a radio room. When Erwin dies during a bombardment and Käthe is brought to the hospital to give birth, Stirlitz is cut off from his contact to the Soviet Union. With the help of two German anti-fascists (the pacifist Pastor Schlag and the scholar Professor Pleischner) he tries to re-establish contact from the Swiss city of Berne and find out more about the possible negotiation between the western Allies and the Nazis. Although Pleischner fails at his mission and commits suicide, Schlag succeeds in eliciting the protagonists and key points of negotiation. Stirlitz then exploits the rivalries among the Nazi elite to bring about the failure of the western Allies' plans. Toward the end of the series Stirlitz is in acute, life-threatening danger because the head of the Gestapo, Müller, suspects him of being a traitor and tries in various ways to uncover him. When Stirlitz's fingerprints are found on Käthe's suitcase, he is arrested by Müller but extracts himself from the whole affair with an explanation for how the fingerprints got there. It is unclear whether Stirlitz is arrested

9 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 259.

and killed after his return from Switzerland because of *new* suspicions. It is certain, however, that he rejected offers from the USSR to return and voluntarily stays in Germany.

Despite its mass appeal, the series has been surprisingly little researched to date. Though several studies are available, most deal with single aspects such as its cult status or the construction of masculine and national identity in *Seventeen Moments*.<sup>10</sup> Until now, the broadest thematic studies address the question of which upheavals the series represents from 1970s Soviet cultural history, and when exactly the end of the Thaw was.<sup>11</sup> The present text brings these hitherto disparate pieces together and delves further into aspects that have received less attention. First I analyze the constructions of identity and values that are represented in the film. Then I illuminate the series' transnational references in a Cold War context through comparison to the James Bond films. Finally, I examine the reasons for the series' popularity and question what the anecdotes about *Seventeen Moments* indicate about its reception.

### National Identity, Masculinity, and Heroicism as Central Values

As Elena Prokhorova has emphasized, the primarily masculine Soviet identity fell into crisis after Stalin's death because the father figure of the "Great Family"<sup>12</sup> was torn from its pedestal during the Thaw.

10 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*; Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*; Rodolphe Baudin, "Le Phénomène de la Série Culte en Contexte Soviétique et Post-Soviétique: L'exemple de Semnadcat' mgnovenij vesny," *Cahiers du monde russe* 1, 2001, pp. 49-70; Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo alibi*.

11 Prokhorova, *Fragmented mythologies*, pp. 81-113; Lovell, *In Search*.

12 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 114-135.

Restabilizing this identity was a major goal of *Seventeen Moments*.<sup>13</sup> To this end, the series communicates an understanding of patriotism and masculinity that is heavily oriented toward Stalin-era patterns and stands in contrast to the cultural production of the Thaw; both of these features are typical of Brezhnev-era films.<sup>14</sup>

Ideal Soviet patriotism is conveyed in Stirlitz's undercover work. For his merit he receives the title "Hero of the Soviet Union". It is no coincidence that the series plays in the time of the "Great Patriotic War" because in the Brezhnev era, Marxist-Leninist ideology had lost much of its legitimacy – not least due to the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 – and official history and culture thus promoted memory of World War II as the single most important source of a common identity.<sup>15</sup> This strategy permitted the construction of a Soviet identity in which ideology played almost no role. The most decisive aspect of this identity – just like in official Soviet discourse during the war – was the defense of the motherland against National Socialism.<sup>16</sup> This politics of history culminated with the 1965 declaration of May 9, Victory Day, as a holiday. Additionally, a multitude of publications and films on World War II appeared. Beginning in the 1970s more films were made showing an unusual and less monumental image of the war, to attract a younger audience. *Seventeen Moments* also served this goal:<sup>17</sup> while the Red Army attacks

13 Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 134.

14 Tony Shaw, Denise Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010, p. 159.

15 Lev Gudkov, "Die Fesseln des Sieges: Russlands Identität aus der Erinnerung an den Krieg," *Kluffen der Erinnerung: Rußland und Deutschland 60 Jahre nach dem Krieg*, special issue, *Osteuropa* 4-6, 2005, pp. 56-73, here 64.

16 Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 133.

17 Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the*



the enemy from the outside, Stirlitz fights against Germany by undermining it from within. He must look, talk, and act like a Nazi in order to fulfil his mission, yet he proves a Soviet patriot because on the inside he remains true to his orders and Soviet values. Stirlitz even celebrates Soviet holidays, though in a very conspiratorial manner – namely in his fantasy alone.<sup>18</sup> The only visible signs are that he raises a glass and makes himself a humble festive meal by baking potatoes in the living room fireplace.

Stirlitz is stylized not only as a Soviet patriot, but also as a superb representative of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>19</sup> Some of his most important traits are ones that are traditionally coded masculine. First, Stirlitz is thoroughly rational, in contrast to the emotional film hero of the Thaw.<sup>20</sup> Each of his actions is thought through entirely, and the viewer often sees him deep in reflection. At the beginning of the series he reviews all the high-ranking dignitaries of the Nazi state, questioning whether they could be interested in a separate peace agreement with the western Allies. Then he researches which people are expediting negotiations and applies diverse strategies in order to hinder their endeavors. During his brief arrest in the basement of the Gestapo headquarters Stirlitz once again proves to be a thinker, keeping a cool head as he goes through all the ways of deflecting suspicion that he may be a Soviet spy.

Moreover, Stirlitz exudes a physical power that corresponds to his inner moral strength. His body language shows authority and

confidence. He never moves hectically or without coordination; rather, his movements always appear well considered and single-minded. The filmic and photographic depiction of Stalin and Stalin-era heroes may continue to have an effect here.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Stirlitz is always self-possessed. He controls his facial expressions so that nobody can read his thoughts or emotions.

Beyond all of this, Stirlitz also acts as a protector for people who are threatened by Nazis and thus conforms to the typical male role in war<sup>22</sup>: he defends his own (above all, women) against the enemy. In particular, he saves Käthe, who is arrested by the Gestapo and put under house arrest, and enables her to flee. Later he brings her and her baby to safety abroad. Indirectly, his hindrance of a separate peace treaty protects his own wife and all other citizens of the USSR.

Stirlitz also follows the traditional male role in that he finds self-fulfillment almost only in his work. In this respect he is lacking in the private and sexual side of masculinity. As scholarship has emphasized, this is a remnant of the hero model of the Stalin era. There, the father role in the family is kept for Stalin or the Party, while the man is to find fulfilment in the public realm.<sup>23</sup> Stirlitz has a wife, but he abnegates her love in favor of his mission and has spent twenty years in Germany without her. His relinquishment of private happiness distinguishes him from most of the heroes in films of the Thaw.

The masculinity glorified by the series is

21 See, for example, the character of the commander in *Meeting on the Elbe*. Isabelle de Keghel, "Meeting on the Elbe (Vstrecha na El'be) – a Visual Representation of the Incipient Cold War from a Soviet Perspective," *The Cold War in Film*, special issue, *Cold War History* 4, 2009, pp. 455-467, here p. 456.

22 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage, 1997, pp. 93-96, 107-110.

23 Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 132.

*Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2007, pp. 143-4, 159-165, 170-3, 184-5.

18 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 261.

19 Robert (Raewyn) Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

20 Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, p. 3. Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. 164-5.

further strengthened by its dominance over any feminine presence. The main characters of *Seventeen Moments* are male. Lioznova added female characters to the novel in order to make Stirlitz appear more human; however, these women all play supporting roles. Furthermore, they speak little or, as in the case of Stirlitz's wife, abide in silence.<sup>24</sup>

### The Cold War Context: Stirlitz and Bond

Stirlitz is frequently called the Russian James Bond.<sup>25</sup> However, the director of *Seventeen Moments*, Lioznova, claimed to have conceived of him as an alternative to the British-American spy.<sup>26</sup> Because of these conflicting views, a comparison of the two characters is illuminating.<sup>27</sup>

At first sight, the Bond films and *Seventeen Moments* are rather different formally and thematically. For one thing, they were made in the differing formats of cinema feature and television series. For another, the Bond films all play in the post-war period, but *Seventeen Moments* during World War II. Nevertheless, a comparison is appropriate because both productions can be read as contributions to the cultural Cold War<sup>28</sup> in that each side attempted to outdo the other with demonstrations of moral superiority. They also competed in seeing which side could achieve greater social cohesion and mobilization. The mass media was a weapon in this competition and was able, thanks to its wide distribution, to reach

both national and international publics.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, the Bond films and *Seventeen Moments* represent the competing value systems and images of the enemy in the east and west.<sup>30</sup> The Bond films, however, were intended for a global audience, including viewers who lived in either system, while *Seventeen Moments* was made exclusively for the "home front", that is, for the public of the Soviet Union or another state socialist country.<sup>31</sup>

Because both productions worked within the same frame of reference of a cultural contest between the east and west,<sup>32</sup> it is not surprising that the two heroes bear similarities. Both Bond and Stirlitz fight for the interests of their countries against a criminal power, that is, they represent good against evil. They have in common that they are subject to great threats, and they master and survive the most dangerous episodes. As Umberto Eco has shown, even the plot structure is similar and in both cases it recalls the build-up of a fairy tale.<sup>33</sup> Broadly speaking, *Seventeen*

29 Caute, *The Dancer*, pp. 3-5, 15; Thomas Lindenberger, "Einleitung", *Massenmedien im Kalten Krieg: Akteure, Bilder, Resonanzen*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2006, pp. 9-23, here p. 12.

30 Shaw, Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, pp. 65-6, 97-8. For a definition of Cold War Culture see Marsha Siefert, "East European Cold War Culture(s): Alterities, Commonalities, and Film Industries," *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*, ed. Annette Vowinkel, Marcus M. Payk and Thomas Lindenberger, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012, pp. 23-49, here p. 25.

31 The first Bond film was already shown in Moscow in 1970, but only for high-level functionaries. Lars-Olav Beier, "Ein Mann wie eine Black Box," *Der Spiegel* 40, 2012, pp. 124-132, here p. 131. In contrast, Soviet films with "Cold war genres" like espionage were commercially exported only to the Socialist countries. Siefert, *East European Cold War Culture(s)*, pp. 36-7.

32 Caute, *The Dancer*, p. 1.

33 Adamovich, *Ne dumai*, pp. 78-9. James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill – a Cultural History of the James Bond Films*, New York, London: Tauris, 2007, pp. 25-6; Marc Föcking, "James Bond – Superuomo

24 Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, p. 8; Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 74.

25 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 82.

26 Adamovich, *Ne dumai*, p. 74.

27 Before the first broadcast of *Seventeen Moments*, there were eight Bond films. The present comparison is based on these eight films.

28 David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 1-16.

*Moments* corresponds to this schema, but with the significant divergence that there is no counterpart to the Bond girl.<sup>34</sup> Bond and Stirlitz are also similar in that they do not undergo any psychological development.<sup>35</sup>

Both of these cultural products reproduce the era's images of the enemy, though to different degrees. Although the first Bond film was released in 1962, the year of the Cuban missile crisis, Bond's early main enemies were not attached to a socialist state; they represented international criminal organizations. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, however, the Cold War's opposing systems unmistakably form the broad context of the plot. Bond's criminal opponents often try to play the superpowers off against one another or cooperate with (ex-)Soviet protagonists, who are in turn depicted as brutal and inhuman or deviant from gender norms.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the plot and sometimes even the terminology of *Seventeen Moments* are marked by the culture of the Cold War, although the series is set in World War II, because it had the duty of reminding the Soviet public during a *détente* in the Cold War that the west is unreliable and untrustworthy. Thus, although the Allies and the USSR cooperate with each other, there are already signs that this pact will soon turn

into a conflict between opposing systems: the western Allies are negotiating with a higher-up in the SS to bargain a separate peace treaty to the detriment of the USSR. Because of the Allies' anti-communist stance, a new war against the USSR even seems possible.<sup>37</sup> Their negative portrayal corresponds to the official Soviet reading of fascism as an extreme development of capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, the differences between the two heroes outweigh their similarities, which I propose is a result of the contrasting value systems of the east and west during the Cold War.

Stirlitz is presented as an attractive man but no lady-killer, unlike Bond.<sup>39</sup> Viewing women as objects of desire was not fitting to the Soviet ideal of gender equality and women's emancipation. In his work, Stirlitz almost always finds himself in the company of men and he rarely encounters women. Unlike Bond, Stirlitz is married and clearly has a deep commitment to his wife. That their love is still very strong becomes clear in the legendary scene in the cafe "Elefant" where they see each other again after many years, though only for a few minutes and from a distance. The wife looks at Stirlitz lovingly while his eyes express more grief, longing, and restraint. Stirlitz never has any affairs in the series; he does not even flirt. The women with whom he has contact are characterized asexually (such as the elderly Frau Saurich) or are—like Käthe—mothers for whom the child takes center stage. The only woman who flirts with him is the SS member Barbara, but he does not respond to her advances for moral and ideological

di massa? Umberto Eco's Fleming-Lektüre und ihre post-moderne (Selbst-)Revision," *James Bond – Anatomie eines Mythos*, ed. Marc Föcking, Astrid Böger, Heidelberg: Winter, 2012, pp. 79-106.

34 I disagree with Adamovich's assertion that the Bond girl is substituted in *Seventeen Moments* by the combination of multiple female characters (see Adamovich, *Ne dumai*, pp. 71-2), because these female characters are all missing the sexual aspect that the Bond girl has.

35 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 268.

36 Chapman, *Licence*, pp. 26-7. Cord Krüger, "Mr. Bond, I expect you to die!" 007s Widersacher und die Transnationalisierung des Bösen," *Mythos 007: Die James-Bond-Filme im Fokus der Popkultur*, ed. Andreas Rauscher, Bernd Zywiets, Georg Mannsperger, Cord Krüger, Mainz: Bender, 2007, pp. 122-149.

37 Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 59. Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, p. 7.

38 See Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 138.

39 The oversexualization of Bond, like the stylization of Stirlitz as an ascetic, can be read as a reaction to a crisis of national identity. See Adamovich, *Ne dumai*, p. 80; Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 138.

reasons.<sup>40</sup>

Bond's hedonistic side distracts him over and over, even though his duties have higher priority; Stirlitz, by contrast, lives entirely for his professional work. Stirlitz's hedonism is limited to culinary pleasures and smoking. Beyond that, he cherishes good clothing, the amenities of home, and his car. His physicality is staged with utmost reserve and accentuated only through well-tailored clothing. Unlike Bond, Stirlitz is never shown naked.

Stirlitz, in contrast to Bond, does not have access to any gadgets, which makes his successes appear all the more heroic. He uses only a rather upscale car and a common pistol. Even so, he hardly needs them because physical violence plays a marginal role in the series: he almost never commits acts of violence and is not subject to any either. He uses his pistol only the one time when he shoots his own agent, the informer Klaus. The other violent action takes place when Stirlitz knocks unconscious the SS man Holtoff, who provoked him. All other duels play out on the level of intellect, most importantly the conflict with his main opponent Müller. Even when he questions Stirlitz in the Gestapo basement, Müller does not resort to violence. In contrast to Bond, there is no "action" for Stirlitz. While the Bond films must always have a car chase and hand-to-hand combat in which Bond makes split-second decisions, the major feature of *Seventeen Moments* is the opposite: its immense slowness and emphasis on dialogue. At the very moment when the Gestapo seeks him, Stirlitz succumbs to immobility and naps in the car on the side of the road, oblivious to danger and thus probably escaping it.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to

Bond, Stirlitz is above all a thinker who takes much time for reflection. This glorification of thinking in *Seventeen Moments* could be related to the logocentric character of Soviet culture in which intellectual achievement was a major criterion for success and respect.<sup>42</sup>

### Reasons for the Series' Popularity

The series became enormously popular immediately after its first broadcast. This is all the more remarkable when one considers its serious weaknesses: the documentary sequences are not convincingly tied to the narrative and the plot does not always seem logical. Also, the character of Stirlitz himself is not coherent. It remains an open question how he could avoid participating in the crimes of the National Socialist regime while establishing a career in the SS. Furthermore, the series contains obvious anachronisms: the interiors and civilian clothing come from fashions of the 1960s, not the 1930s, and the Edith Piaf songs that Stirlitz and Pleischner hear on their trip to Switzerland were recorded after the war.<sup>43</sup>

It is impossible to quantify how popular *Seventeen Moments* was, but it was a blockbuster for certain. Contemporaries have reported that when it aired the streets were empty, criminal activity dropped, and the energy demands of so many televisions brought power stations to their limits.<sup>44</sup> The series was in such demand that it was rebroadcast up to four times every year. Another indication of its success is the immense popularity of the actor Tikhonov, who for the rest of his life was associated with

40 Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, pp. 56-7; Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 138; Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, p. 8.

41 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, pp. 87-8. Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 54.

42 Adamovich, *Ne dumai*, p. 80; Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 138; Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 95; Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 56.

43 Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, pp. 60, 64. Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, pp. 2-3.

44 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 82.



his role as Stirlitz.<sup>45</sup>

What factors contributed to the legendary success of *Seventeen Moments*—success that came entirely unexpectedly for its makers, and for the director Lioznova in particular?<sup>46</sup> I will review a few of the hypotheses developed in earlier research.

The ambivalence of *Seventeen Moments*' characters caused a sensation. The film differs from earlier dramatizations of World War II in that it showed Germans as highly intelligent enemies and complex characters. Müller especially—the head of the Gestapo—was hardly different from an ordinary police chief. The leading Nazi characters became even more complex by virtue of being played by actors whose roles in earlier, prominent Thaw films embodied sincerity and authority.<sup>47</sup> Stirlitz is multi-faceted and contradictory in his own fascinating way: although he looks like a representative of the lawless Nazi state, he is actually fighting for the “right”, Soviet side. For this reason, Lipovetskii has correctly called him the “powerful archetype” of the “*nash/nenash*” dichotomy, connecting the elements of “us” and “them.”<sup>48</sup> This unusually positive filmic representation of leading members of the SS had the unintended consequence that in the 1970s and 1980s numerous secret “fascist organizations” were founded in the USSR, with their members clearly more fascinated by the image of the Nazi than by National Socialist ideology. The KGB considered them

to be relatively harmless.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1980s two youth groups in the Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk were labelled “fascist” by the KGB in the course of an anti-rock campaign. The reason was that after their arrest they testified that they felt inspired by the “images of the ‘clean, intelligent, and civilized’ Nazi officers” in the series and therefore tried to imitate their clothing and behaviour.<sup>50</sup>

*Seventeen Moments*' popularity was increased significantly by some parallels between life under Brezhnev and under Hitler, at least as was shown in the series. In each case we see a political system in the phase of its decline, in which the ruling ideology had suffered the loss of most of its credibility. Each state was marked by a powerful bureaucracy that produced files written in a highly repetitive, stereotypical style.<sup>51</sup> The series even addresses the surveillance of individuals—an experience familiar to Soviet citizens. The film's protagonists react to phone tapping with typically Soviet phrases such as “this isn't a conversation for the telephone.”

Furthermore, the pattern by which Stirlitz acts in the National Socialist system strongly resembles the survival strategy used by many Soviets under late Socialism. Stirlitz denies his inner thoughts and emotions in order to demonstrate outwardly his support for the regime as credibly as possible; he hides his true self behind a mask.<sup>52</sup>

45 After his death and burial, a large photograph of him as Stirlitz was laid upon the fresh gravesite. See “Tikhonov Viacheslav Vasil'evich (1928-2009)”, *Novodevich'e kladbishche*, <http://nd.m-necropol.ru/>, accessed December 12, 2013.

46 Tat'iana Lioznova, “Populiarnost' byla dlia nas sovershenno neozhidanno!...”, *Krupnyi plan*, <http://www.close-up.ru/articles/detail.php?AID=7859>, accessed 8 December 2012, p. 1.

47 Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, pp. 5-6. Prokhorova, *Fragmented mythologies*, p. 93.

48 Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, p. 4. See also Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 56.

49 There had been underground Nazi groups in the USSR already since the second half of the 1950s. Semen Charnyi, “Natsistskie gruppy v SSSR v 1950-1980 gody,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 5, 2004, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2004/37/ch12-pr.html>, accessed 14 May 2014.

50 Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010, p. 277.

51 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, pp. 91, 95, 103; Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 263; Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, pp. 6-7.

52 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, pp. 104-105;

The third aspect that made the series so attractive was that Stirlitz is characterized as a member of the intelligentsia. This educational class was traditionally associated with high moral standards and a critical distance from the state, and continued to enjoy prestige during the Soviet era. Interestingly, Stirlitz embodies only the intelligentsia's positive aspects: wit, education, concentration, and firm ethical principles. Thus, as an intelligentsia hero, he especially invites the viewers' identification. All negative aspects of the intelligentsia are attributed to Professor Pleishner: unlike Stirlitz, he is unsuited to the practical, difficult things in life; he is overly trusting, inept, and scattered.<sup>53</sup>

The fascination borne by the series feeds on the way that it shows life in the west as it was imagined in the Soviet Union at the time.<sup>54</sup> Consumption and lifestyle thus occupy an important place.<sup>55</sup> Stirlitz lives in a roomy house with considerably more living space at his disposal than the average Soviet citizen had. He wears well-fitting suits, loves good food, Armenian cognac, and cigarettes, and frequents various Berlin cafes. The picture is completed by the flair of worldliness that encircles Stirlitz, since he clearly knows his way around not only Germany, but also other countries that were inaccessible to most Soviet citizens such as France and Switzerland. These aspects of the film accommodate the increasing interest in the west in the Soviet Union during

the Brezhnev era.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, the series' particular aesthetic gives it a distinctly authentic feel. *Seventeen Moments* is comprised largely of feature film scenes, but they are interspersed with Soviet newsreels and other archival footage and are filmed only in black and white. The fade-in of specific dates between sections of feature film and the introduction of leading characters with the help of their staff files amplifies the documentary effect.

### Stirlitz Anecdotes

The broad popularity of the television series is probably the main reason why one of the largest bodies of anecdotes from the whole Soviet period is associated with it. Another factor is that *Seventeen Moments* comes from the Brezhnev era, a time when the telling of anecdotes reached its high point.<sup>57</sup>

Drawing on the work of Seth Graham, I consider anecdotes to be orally passed on, ultra-short stories from unknown authors that are usually told in the third person and end with a punch line. Graham emphasizes the subversive potential of the anecdote, which represents a discourse counter to the *official* discourse under conditions of censorship. In contrast to *samizdat*, this counter-discourse was not chiefly produced by the intelligentsia, but by all social strata. Soviet anecdotes can therefore be seen as a form of modern

Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 62. The persuasiveness of this description of Soviet citizens' behavior towards the end of the USSR has been questioned since Alexei Yurchak's study of the last Soviet generation. See Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Lipovetskii, *Iskusstvo*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> See for the "imaginary West": Yurchak, *Everything*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>55</sup> Prokhorova, *Fragmented mythologies*, p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Lovell, *In Search*, p. 316.

<sup>57</sup> Seth Benedict Graham, *A Cultural Analysis of the Russo-Soviet Anecdote*, PhD thesis Pittsburgh 2003, [http://etd.library.pitt.edu/ETD/available/etd-11032003-192424/unrestricted/grahamsethb\\_etd2003.pdf](http://etd.library.pitt.edu/ETD/available/etd-11032003-192424/unrestricted/grahamsethb_etd2003.pdf), accessed 3 December 2012, p. 4. Alexei Yurchak, "The cynical reason of late socialism: power, pretense, and the *anekdot*," *Public culture* 2, 1997, pp. 161-188, here p. 176.; Yurchak, *Everything*, pp. 273-274; Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 109.

folklore.<sup>58</sup>

In the following I analyze the Stirlitz anecdotes as a product of popular culture that emerged from below in response to the official popular culture that the series represented. These anecdotes told by average Soviet citizens in their everyday life shed light on what viewers found especially interesting, confusing, or attractive about the series, as well as how it was read and given new meaning by its audience.<sup>59</sup> For this reason I have limited the analysis to Stirlitz anecdotes that make direct reference to the theme and plot of the film, that is, those that fulfil the criteria of intertextuality.<sup>60</sup>

Many anecdotes make irony of the series' narrative structure, in which an omniscient, omnipresent speaker neutrally comments on or explains the plot in voice-over (read by Efim Kopelian). He creates connections between the fairly heterogeneous film segments and reveals the characters' thoughts, which often stand in contrast to their actions. The narrator functions as the voice of the Party state and thus tries to steer its reception.<sup>61</sup> Typical phrases from the voice-over are frequently made fun of in anecdotes. Thus, the frequent statement "He

[Stirlitz] had never been so close to failure" is repeated *ad absurdum*, always after actions by the spy that would surely have led to his exposure—for example, the revelation of his Soviet identity through the exhibition of clichéd Soviet or revolutionary attributes like carrying a red banner or singing revolutionary songs.<sup>62</sup>

The anecdotes devoted to the narrator's voice-over simultaneously make straightforward fun of the superhuman abilities that the voice attributes to Stirlitz.

Very frequently they ridicule his distinctive self-discipline, especially his ability to wake up without an alarm clock at exactly the desired time. The narrator mentions this ability when Stirlitz takes a nap in the car while the Gestapo frantically searches for him. In the original, the voice-over assures listeners that Stirlitz will wake up after twenty minutes out of trained habit,<sup>63</sup> but the anecdotes often change the context and take a turn for the absurd.<sup>64</sup> For example, after having visited a bar, Stirlitz stumbles into a puddle but—as the narrator assures us—he will wake up after twenty minutes thanks to this long-trained reflex.<sup>65</sup> Here, Stirlitz's character oscillates between the indiscipline of the drunkard and the discipline of a man who can control when he will awake, despite excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>66</sup>

Numerous anecdotes question Stirlitz's self-discipline without referencing the narrator. Frequently these stories abrogate the desexualization of the Soviet agent, which was clearly held to be unconvincing. They destroy the image of Stirlitz as an ascetic by ascribing

58 Graham, *A Cultural Analysis*, pp. 119-120, 122-4, 137, 156.

59 The first Stirlitz anecdotes were created soon after the film's first broadcast and more are still being invented in the present day. This poses a methodological problem: because the anecdotes are undated, it cannot be determined when they were first told. I therefore only make use of anecdotes that do not explicitly reference the post-Soviet era. Nevertheless, some of the anecdotes possibly date from after the fall of the USSR.

60 On the intertextuality of anecdote to film, see Graham, *A Cultural Analysis*, pp. iv, 138.

61 Prokhorova, *The Post-Utopian*, p. 136. In a way, his semi-official function recalls Levitan, the radio newscaster who read the Sovinformbiuro's news from the front during World War II. However, Kopelian reads with much less pathos in his voice. Vladimir Tol'ts, Aleksandra Arkhipova, "Novyi Shtirlits," *Istoriia i sovremennost'*, 23-07-05, accessed December 12, 2012. <http://archive.svoboda.org/programs/TD/2005/TD.072305.asp>, accessed December 9, 2012, p. 3.

62 *Literaturnyi proekt Dmitriia Kravtseva*, <http://maximych.ax3.net/shtirlits.html>, accessed December 9, 2012.

63 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 96.

64 Baudin, *Le Phénomène*, p. 65.

65 Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 110.

66 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 263.

him sexual relationships, mostly with the radio operator Käthe. Thus an anecdote featuring the Gestapo boss Müller, for example, has him asserting that he knows everything about Stirlitz and Käthe. Stirlitz promptly admits to being a Soviet spy, but Müller does not believe him and rejects the statement as a trick for circumventing child support. This insinuation undermines the agent's integrity that had received so much emphasis in the original film. Aside from the stories that embed the revelation of a secret sexual relationship in other communication, there are also diverse short anecdotes that mention Stirlitz and Käthe having just had sex.<sup>67</sup>

Further anecdotes mock the way that Stirlitz manoeuvres himself out of difficult situations with excuses that do not hold water. At the same time the anecdotes poke fun at Müller's gullibility.<sup>68</sup> A typical anecdote recounts how Müller enters his office to find Stirlitz sitting near the safe, raising the suspicion that he wants to steal important documents. Müller takes him to task and Stirlitz answers that he is waiting for the tram. Initially, Müller accepts that as an adequate explanation and leaves the office again, but in the corridor he begins to doubt. Wondering how a tram could run through his office, he hurries back, but Stirlitz has disappeared. Instead of becoming even more alarmed, Müller assumes that his enemy has already left by tram.<sup>69</sup>

These anecdotes about the narration and Stirlitz's self-discipline can be understood as a subversive reaction to attempts to steer the series' reception through the omniscient narrator and as a reaction against the stylization of Stirlitz as an unbeatable superhuman. The stories make Stirlitz's heroicism laughable

without completely undoing his hero status. They also make irony of the narrative's inconsistencies and the composition of the characters. The tellers of the anecdotes make themselves into "media critics"<sup>70</sup> and produce counter-narratives to particular aspects of the series. They re-form Stirlitz into a more human hero with inadequacies—such as a disposition to alcohol—and sexual needs.

A further group of anecdotes concerns the contradictory, multiple, or blurred identities of the Stirlitz character which clearly fascinated viewers: on one hand he was the Soviet secret agent Isaev and on the other, a member of the SS. As a result, anecdotes represent Stirlitz as a person who has trouble managing his multiple identities. For example, Stirlitz wakes up in a cell and wonders which person he should be, depending on who the guard is. He decides to call himself Stirlitz if confronted by a German guard and Isaev if a Soviet soldier walks in. The anecdote continues in a way for which Stirlitz is unprepared: he meets a Soviet policeman, but the policeman addresses him as Tikhonov, and accuses him of having been incredibly drunk the day before.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the anecdote is not chiefly about the self-image of the character Isaev/Stirlitz, but about that of the actor Tikhonov who forgets his real identity because he is so absorbed in his film role. The context of this anecdote is that in the series' reception the character Stirlitz and the actor who played him, Viacheslav Tikhonov, fused into one person.<sup>72</sup>

It is also noteworthy that national boundaries become porous in many of the Stirlitz anecdotes, such that characteristics of the political

67 *Literaturnyi proekt*.

68 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 261.

69 *Literaturnyi proekt*.

70 Graham, *A Cultural Analysis*, p. 148.

71 *Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny: Sait liubimogo teleseriala. Anekdoty*, accessed December 10, 2012, <http://mgnoveniya.ru/anekdoty/>.

72 Nepomnyashchy, *The Blockbuster*, p. 257. Prokhorova, *Fragmented Mythologies*, p. 108.



systems in the USSR and Nazi Germany start to melt. This type of anecdote probably hints at the film's visible parallels between the two countries. To name one example: Müller announces to Stirlitz he will have to participate in a *subbotnik*, that is, in unpaid work during leisure time for the benefit of Soviet society. Stirlitz reports for work and realizes that he has uncovered himself by doing so. Then he admits to being a Soviet spy. Müller then calls Stirlitz's superior Schellenberg and tells him that people are inventing the most impossible excuses to avoid the *subbotnik*.<sup>73</sup> This story takes a particular form of labor mobilization from the Soviet Union and transfers it to Nazi Germany.

Were these anecdotes a subversive practice that held the potential to destabilize the political system, or were they humor that functioned within and stabilized the system? Many anecdotes had a certain subversive quality because they criticize the dominance of the narrator's interpretation over the audience's own. This applies to the stylization of Stirlitz as a superhero and to the shortcomings in plot and character composition. Collectively, however, their subversive potential was far more limited than that of anecdotes about Soviet leaders or Communism's central dogmas. This has much to do with the setting of *Seventeen Moments in World War II*. The main statement of the series pertains to the heroic struggle in defense of the country, and the Stirlitz anecdotes never question this.

### Conclusion

As this analysis shows, *Seventeen Moments of Spring* is not only one of the most important

products of official popular culture in the USSR, but also a successful PR project on behalf of the KGB. It contributed to the strengthening of patriotism and masculinity at a time when both were in crisis in the USSR after Stalin's death. The series was also successful in terms of its Cold War context. Stirlitz proved to be a viable alternative to his British counterpart Bond and embodied the superiority of the USSR over the west in a way that fascinated his home public. The Soviet viewers received the series with great enthusiasm, but also appropriated it and criticized its weaknesses, as the many Stirlitz anecdotes indicate. However, the subversive potential of this popular culture "from below" was rather restricted and never put into question communist ideology or leadership. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the series could not develop any PR-like effect because it remained – and remains – unknown.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<sup>73</sup> *Semmadtsat' mgnovenii*.

## Abstract

In the last one and a half decades of the Soviet Union, Estonian pop and rock artists suddenly gained popularity on a Soviet national level. The number of these artists was limited, but they had a huge impact and are still well known in the former Soviet Union. The success of Estonian artists had many reasons. One of them was the Soviet cultural politics of light entertainment music. This type of music served both educational and leisure purposes. Another reason was the political situation of the time. Soviet citizens gained more access to western cultural products, including pop music. In this context, Estonian pop music was seen as a domestic replacement for western music. And last but not least, Estonian artists took the opportunity to travel, to make money and to get famous

**Keywords:** estrada, VIA, Estonian invasion, Soviet West, informal music industry.

This paper<sup>1</sup> analyzes a little studied aspect of Soviet Estonian culture. The 1970s and 1980s were a period of extreme popularity for Estonian light pop music (*estrada*) all over the Soviet Union. Artists like Jaak Joala, Anne Veski or Gunnar Graps as well as bands like *Apelsin* or *Fix* are today still well known to people over 40 inside the former Soviet republics. In my paper I discuss the reason and mechanism for their success. Within the strict Soviet cultural framework existed a pop culture that manipulated categories and structures of the official “workers’ culture”. First of all, Estonia was the Soviet west and Soviet culture managers in Goskontsert and other state organizations promoted that image in order to create popular stadium artists. Estonian artists were encouraged not to sing in Russian and appear as if they were western pop stars. This way Estonian music was manipulated as a substitute for western pop music in order to satisfy demand for western music. Last but not least, the success of Estonian artists was a product of the

informal music industry in the Soviet Union. Every successful Estonian artist had one or multiple informal managers who used their contacts to get maximum airplay in key musical programs of Soviet central TV channels and as many big concerts as possible. The article shows that a profit-oriented music business existed in the Soviet Union that operated within the framework of the socialist cultural institutions.

\* \* \*

As soon as the taxi driver in the former capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, heard where I came from he started to complain: “For a long time I have been looking for a song of Tõnis Mägi but they do not play it. Never.” And he hummed me a melody I was unable to recognize. This happened in March 2012 and was not the first time in a former Soviet republic where I encountered the fame and popularity of Estonian artists and their music during the Soviet era. As a matter of fact I was not exactly surprised. Since the mid-1990s, when I began my research in Russian Siberia and the Far East, I constantly met people who associated my Estonian origin with the once famous singers such as Jaak Joala, Tõnis

1 I am grateful to all musicians for their interviews and Boris Belge and Sergei I. Zhuk for their invaluable comments and support. This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory CECT) and by the institutional research funding IUT34-32 of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

Mägi or Anne Veski.

The short period between the mid-seventies and the end of perestroika in the late 1980s which some of my informants call “the invasion of Estonian music”<sup>2</sup> is generally neglected in academic and popular writing, both in Estonia and abroad. In the few works that discuss Soviet popular and underground music, the topic is mainly associated with Russian music, and precisely with the music from the central cities of Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>3</sup> The western academic interest in Soviet era music culture, especially the late Soviet period, seems to focus on rock as an ambivalent semi-illegal music culture that embodies resistance to the socialist mass culture.<sup>4</sup> This is the only context where Estonia is mentioned in English language articles – as a setting for the discussion

of the relatively liberal cultural shift where the first rock and jazz festivals were organized.<sup>5</sup> This image of Soviet Estonia is also supported by numerous non-academic pieces. Russian rock journalist (and probably the only rock journalist of the Soviet Union) Artemii Troitskii characterizes Estonia as a rock paradise of the Soviet Union, where rock was played on the radio and gained full support from the local institutions of culture.<sup>6</sup> However, other genres of popular music receive little or no attention in his book. In Estonia, the period of the “Estonian invasion” is also largely ignored, although for other reasons. Estonian artists, who in the 1980s performed in Russia, were often criticized in Estonia during the Soviet era, especially for singing in Russian. In many respects, these musicians were regarded as a form of “collaboration” with the Soviet authority. This explains why this aspect of culture in Soviet Estonia is rarely mentioned in the wave of autobiographies, biographies and nostalgic publications. The “Russian period” in Estonian language publications is extensively discussed only in two works.<sup>7</sup> This article is a reflection on the research of work-in-process and draws on some very limited written resources but also on interviews conducted with former members of the Estonian bands *Fix* and *Apelsin*, and people related to the former Estonian Philharmony. Methodologically it combines anthropology and history to scrutinize the mechanisms of Soviet culture industry using Estonian artists as an example.

2 It is difficult to prove, but some of my informants believe that the term “Estonian invasion” was coined by the singer Ivo Linna in one of his interviews. However, the term is currently widely used especially with regard to Estonian Soviet era musicians and culture managers. [Interviews with Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011 and Väino Land, 4 December 2012.]

3 David MacFadyen, *Red Stars: Personality and Soviet Popular Song, 1955–1991*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001; David MacFadyen, *Estrada?! Grand Narratives and the Philosophy of the Russian Popular Songs since Perestroika*, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002; Robert A Rothstein, “The Quiet Rehabilitation of the Brick Factory: Early Soviet Popular Music and Its Critics”, *Slavic Review* 39 (3), 1980, pp. 373–388; Michael Urban, *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture, and Community in Unsettled Times*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004; one of the rare exceptions is the analysis of Soviet Ukrainian rock in Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985*, Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press & Washington and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010.

4 Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*, Albany: State University of New York, 1995; Julia P. Friedman and Adam Weiner, “Between A Rock and Hard Place: Holy Rus’ and its Alternatives in Russian Rock Music”, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele Marie Barker, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999, pp. 110–137.

5 Urban, *Russia Gets the Blues*; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006.

6 Artemii Troitskii, *Back in the USSR*, Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2007, p. 117.

7 Harri Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, Tallinn: Varrak, 2009; Vello Salumets, *Rockrapsoodia*, Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 1998.

## Soviet culture industry

The term “culture industry” was developed by Adorno and Horkheimer in response to the notion that the music business is just a mechanism to make profit by establishing a coherent “mass culture” to “manufacture” quite tasteless music that people passively accept.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that the skeptical sentiments of Adorno were shaped by his disillusionment with the development of “low art” in general and a dislike of jazz in particular.<sup>9</sup> A strong antipathy to jazz and a critical view of the capitalist production of music was something that most Soviet ideologists and politicians of culture had in common with Adorno. The official understanding of Soviet culture was that it was not profit-oriented but had ideological goals to educate and entertain socialist people, a position that denied the existence of any kind of culture industry. However, by taking a closer look it seems that even in the framework of the ideological regulations and planned economy the existence of a culture industry cannot be dismissed. The development of the Soviet Estonian entertainment music industry must be seen in the context of musical life in the whole of the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities were keen to provide “socialist fun”, but the details and meaning of how the “fun” should be constitut-

ed were unclear and ambiguous.<sup>10</sup> First of all, it must be noted that in the Soviet Union there was no perceived difference between “high brow” and “low brow” music as was the case in the west. Moreover, it seems that the boundaries between musical genres have never been as clearly formulated as in the western market-oriented music business.<sup>11</sup> Opera and other genres of orchestrated classical music in the Soviet Union were accessible to the proletarian masses.<sup>12</sup> Composers like Shostakovich and Prokofiev were well known and listened to. Their music was not only taught in schools but even used in children’s cartoons. Furthermore, the border between “serious” folk and “light” entertainment music (which was later called *estrada*) remained blurry: orchestrated folk songs were in the repertoire of pop music performers, who often switched groups and styles between the “serious” and “light” genres. Simultaneously, in Soviet music it was not unusual for folk groups to adopt the *estrada* style to achieve more success and respectively re-arrange their songs to fit that genre.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the western music business, there was also a lack of competition for recorded music. In the Soviet Union there was only one record company – Melodiia –, probably the biggest record company in world history. It released a chaotic multitude of different styles of music,

8 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, eds. M. G. Durham and D. M. Kellner, Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 71-101.

9 Cited from Jay M. Bernstein, “Introduction”, *Theodor W. Adorno: The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, London and New York: Routledge, 1980, pp. 1-28; John Hutnyk, “At Womad: South Asian crossovers and the limits of hybridity talk”, *Postcolonial Studies* 1 (3), 1998, pp. 401-426; John Hutnyk, *Critique Of Exotica: Music, Politics, and the Culture Industry*, London: Pluto Press, 2000.

10 Gleb Tzipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945–1970*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

11 Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Identities*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

12 Rothstein, “The Quiet Rehabilitation”; Nelli Grigor’evna Shakhnazarova, *Paradokсы sovetskoi muzykal’noi kul’tury: 30-e gody* [Paradoxes of Soviet Musical Culture: The 1930s], Moscow: Izdateloi muzykal’ev, 2001.

13 Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999; Susannah Lockwood Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals: The Socialist-Realist Transformation of a Russian Folk Choir”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3 (3), 2002, pp. 393-425.



but its policy (and output) remain a mystery even today. The reason for the distinctive nature of Soviet music was its political and educational mission – controlled by several state institutions – to propagate socialist values. It must be noted that the debate about what precisely is proper “music for the masses” began with the early years of the Soviet Union and continued until its collapse.<sup>14</sup>

The existence of the top-down control of state institutions did not mean that Soviet music was completely manipulated and controlled by the state. Tomoff argues in his review on Shakhnazarova that classical music existed despite state control and was complete with artistic ambitions for high levels of musical expression and an ambivalent response to the pressure to create music according to the canons of Socialist Realism.<sup>15</sup> There were similar tendencies in the whole of the Soviet cultural sphere. This does not mean that individual and state interests were in conflict. Alexei Yurchak calls it a “deeper paradox of the socialist system” that at first inspection contradictory elements, positions and cultural manifestations existed together.<sup>16</sup> This argument in his book – and the paradox in general – is mostly neglected in academic writing, whereby several scholars support the view that Soviet citizens lived a double life where the public and private spheres were strictly separated.<sup>17</sup>

14 MacFayden, *Red Stars*; Rothstein, *The Quiet Rehabilitation*.

15 Kiril Tomoff, “Paradoksy sovetskoi muzykal’noi kultury: 30-e gody, and: Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music (review)”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (2), pp. 466-480.

16 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 168.

17 Tamara Dragadze, “The Domestication of Religion Under Soviet Communism”, *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, ed. Chris M. Hann, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 141-151; Caroline Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Katherine Verdery, *What was socialism, and what comes next?*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

However, the black and white portrayal of Soviet life does not help us to understand such a complex society and is especially problematic when it comes to the analysis of everyday socialist culture. The Soviet Union and the whole socialist block did not exist in a vacuum, as contacts with the western world existed on a formal and informal level. Music, fashion and other spheres of “capitalist” mass culture were followed, copied and consumed by Soviet people, ironically and not always illegally.<sup>18</sup> Despite the intention of designing a new socialist cultural space, authorities and industry were too slow and ineffective to create the socialist substitute for the more attractive western consumer culture. Therefore, products of the west were known and valued.<sup>19</sup> In very limited amounts, western music or consumer goods were legally available, or re-produced by Soviet artists, fashion designers or enterprises. Yurchak’s reading of Soviet internationalism demonstrates its ambivalence between the concepts of “bad” and “good” culture: “Ultimately, this means that one did not have to think of ‘socialist’ and ‘bourgeois’ cultural forms as inherently incompatible because their meaning could shift depending on how and where these forms were used.”<sup>20</sup> As an example, Yurchak uses jazz music which was both considered as the protest music of African Americans and as a “bourgeois” decadent music.<sup>21</sup> A similar ambivalence existed across all spheres of life, especially culture. Moreover, the ambivalent position of western culture increased

versity Press, 1996.

18 S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

19 Davis Cauter, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

20 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 165.

21 Ibid., pp. 166-7.

during the short period of relaxation or détente which is politically regarded as rather unsuccessful.<sup>22</sup> However, détente legalized western music, films and other art forms in the Soviet environment. From my childhood I recall reading newspaper articles harshly critical of the “bourgeois” governments of France and Italy. At the same time I grew up with French and Italian comedies, openly shown in Estonian cinemas. Détente made it also possible for western music to receive some airplay on Soviet radio and to be released on the Melodiia record label.<sup>23</sup>

The “deeper paradox of the socialist system” applies – among other things – to Soviet (light) music culture. It is difficult to say when the concept of *estrada* was born and this question is also beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the concept has multiple meanings and contents as shown by the scholar of Russian popular music David MacFadyen who discusses the Russian term *estrada* investigating the word’s French roots. MacFadyen argues that in the French tradition *estrada* means “small stage”, and defines it as “a wide ranging term that includes pop music as well as modern dance, comedy, circus arts, and any other performance not on the ‘big,’ classical stage”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, *estrada* artists could have been stand up or circus artists and were often officially named so. However, in the popular understanding of Soviet people, the term *estrada* was interchangeably associated with the term “popular music” or “pop music” and the term *svezdy estrady* (*estrada* stars) was generally (but not exclusively) used to indicate suc-

cessful and well-known singers. *Estrada* music was not always dance music but could also be for seated concert halls and take the form of a romantic song or ballad. *Estrada* as the broad Soviet pop music genre was sometimes very ironic, while some artists were deadly serious, some songs were extremely *Schlager*-like whereas others included elements of rock music.<sup>25</sup> The musical output is probably not as defining for the genre as the form: typical for *estrada* music was (and still is) that the singers were – as a rule – accompanied by huge orchestras dominated by wind instruments. While the nature of *estrada* is fluid, there is also another phenomenon surrounding Soviet pop music – the vocal-instrumental ensemble (*vokal’no-instrumental’nyi ansambl’*) or VIA. It is generally agreed that the term was used for state approved rock collectives because the word “rock” was essentially forbidden in the Soviet Union. Due to the Soviet institutional setting, all music collectives had to be registered (more about this below) and because it was impossible to register as a “rock ensemble” yet impossible to ignore the popularity of rock music, the concept of the VIA was invented in 1966.<sup>26</sup> However, there is evidence that the term VIA was used for the first time on a concert poster in 1964 by the seven-piece band *Avangard* from Donetsk, Ukraine, who would perform their own interpretations of western artists like Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Hollies or The Shadows.<sup>27</sup>

25 Ingo Grabowsky, “Motor der Verwestlichung: Das sowjetische Estrada-Lied 1950-1975”, *Osteuropa* 62, 2012, pp. 21-35.

26 David-Emil Wickström and Yngvar B. Steinholt, “Visions of the (Holy) Motherland in Contemporary Russian Popular Music: Nostalgia, Patriotism, Religion and Russkii Rok”, *Popular Music and Society* 32 (3), 2009, pp. 313-330, here p. 314; Troitskii, *Back in the USSR*.

27 Evgenii Iasenov, *Zdes’ nachinalis’ VIA* 2012, <http://www.donjetsk.com/retro/1592-zdes-nachinalis-via.html>, accessed 30 December 2012.

22 Robert G. Kaiser, “U.S.-Soviet Relations: Good-bye to Détente”, *Foreign Affairs* 59, 1980, pp. 500-521.

23 Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, pp. 125-126, 166. It must be noted that no one I have spoken to in Estonia had heard about the Détente but the word used in Estonian was “pingelödvendus”.

24 MacFadyen, *Estrada?!*, p. 3.

The scholars (and supporters) of Russian and Soviet rock tend to juxtapose the VIAs as “official” watered down rock as opposed to the “real” or unofficial rock bands.<sup>28</sup> (However, the opinion of VIA musicians is usually not asked for. Väino Land, the leader and initiator of the Estonian VIA *Fix* explained to me that VIAs were neither rock nor *estrada* but should be seen in the tradition of western bands like The Bee Gees or The Eagles. Their music was distinguishable by a high level of musicianship and complicated song structure.<sup>29</sup> Line ups of the VIAs were usually large, containing six to twelve musicians. It was not unusual for a VIA to have three singers, string and wind instruments, keyboards, and to be accompanied by electric guitars. The music of one VIA band could contain a mixture of different genres from folk, reggae, pop, rock or *estrada*. Their appearance was also not unified. For instance, the Belorussian group *Pesniary* not only performed psychedelic versions of folk tunes but also wore folk costumes on the stage. The Estonian band *Fix* had in its heyday various costumes for the band members encapsulating the image of a rocker, worker, *estrada* artist and so forth. Considering the nature of VIA-music, the assumption that VIA was a young musicians’ attempt to play rock music within an ideologically determined official framework sounds more correct than the previously mentioned negative interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

In order to be officially recognized or to have the status as a “professional” performer, all artists and bands had to be registered and were subject to various regulations. *Estrada* performers and VIAs had to belong to a certain enterprise (as club artists) or to a state

concert agency (philharmony). Every Soviet republic and most big cities had their own philharmonic orchestra (*Roskontsert*, Estonian Philharmony, Moscow Philharmony, etc.) which was subordinated to the state concert agencies of *Goskontsert* and *Sovkontsert*. In order to perform, every professional artist had to undergo “tarification” (*tarifitseerimine* in Estonian), a demonstration concert in front of a committee that determined the “artistic” level of the performer. According to that level, performers were given a “category”. The musical “category” was important because it determined the activity and income of the performer. Artists with lower categories were allowed to perform only in factory clubs or houses of culture, whereas a higher category meant permission to perform all over the Soviet Union and abroad. The higher the category, the higher was the salary tariff or *punktitasu* per performance. The tariff was paid independent of the size of crowd and length of performance. The “tarification” was essential for determining a musician’s position in the artists’ and bands’ community, because the category affected directly their travel possibilities and size of audience. Not only were lower category artists unable to perform officially outside their home republic, but because categories were given according to “artistic maturity” it also symbolized the quality of the band.

VIAs and *estrada* artists not only had to prove their level of mastery but also register their repertoire. The bulk of a set list of a Soviet performer had to contain works of Soviet composers (especially members of the Union of Composers) and only a small percentage was left for works of composers from other socialist countries and an even smaller share allowed for music of western origin.<sup>31</sup> This reg-

28 Cushman, *Notes from Underground*; Steinholt and Wickström, “Introduction”; Troitskii, *Back in the USSR*.

29 Interview with Väino Land, 4 december 2012.

30 Grabowsky, “Motor der Verwestlichung”, p. 31.

31 Cited from Rothstein, “The Quiet Rehabilitation”.

ulation is often interpreted as a strategy for the ideological control over music to guarantee a correct ideological bias for the entertainment of the masses. Alas, these regulations had a financial basis as well. "In the Soviet Union a well functioning copyright system existed," explained Alar Madisson, long time vocalist and manager of *Fix*.<sup>32</sup> "At every concert we had to fill in repertoire lists and the authors of these songs received money. When your songs were popular then all the bands played them and altogether the sum of money could be very substantial. Can you imagine how many thousands of roubles Raimonds Pauls earned with his '*Alye rozy*' (*Purple roses*)? Every restaurant band played it." The role of the Union of Composers as the monopolist Soviet music publisher remains unstudied. However, in cooperation with other state institutions like *Muzfond*<sup>33</sup> and *Kompozitor* publishing house the Union of Composers collected and distributed royalty money and was therefore interested in ensuring that the songs of its members were performed as a first priority. This also explains why throughout the Soviet period the Union of Composers lobbied for the compulsory use of its members music.<sup>34</sup>

A clear picture of the Soviet culture industry

remains elusive if the economic interests of concert agencies and the state record company Melodiia are not included. Melodiia's profits remain a mystery akin to its erratic catalogue. The role and activity of the philharmonies or state music agencies must also be incorporated into the picture. The role of concert agencies will be discussed later but they were subordinated to the planned economy similar to all Soviet enterprises and fulfilling of the plan was – as a rule – accompanied with a high bonus payment to its workers. Moreover, there is evidence from my interviews and in published sources that the philharmonies or music agencies were engaged in organizing "black" concerts or events where the profit was directly distributed by the organizers and performers. Taking a closer look at the activities of institutions whose official goal was to organize and oversee the correct ideological entertainment of Soviet people, the economic motivation of all these institutions cannot be ignored.

### Estonian invasion and music business

Estonia has a strong entertainment music tradition oriented to western musical styles. In the 1930s, Estonia danced the foxtrot and tango, popular dances everywhere in Europe.<sup>35</sup> This western orientation continued after the incorporation into the Soviet Union: in the 1960s Estonia was swamped by the beat music and rock performed by "guitar ensembles".<sup>36</sup> Estonian young people along with musicians tried to be up to date with contemporary developments in pop and rock throughout the Soviet era. In several memoirs, people spoke of how new records appeared in Estonia within a few months or even weeks after they

32 Interview with Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011.

33 Muzfond was a Soviet state cultural institution whose task was to provide finances to Soviet composers. These finances were grants, loans, and stipends. The institution also managed houses, nurseries and vacation resorts to be used by members of the Composers' Union. All members of the Composers' Union were automatically members of Muzfond, but Muzfond was allowed to admit members who had no Union membership. Muzfond received 5 percent of publication royalties and 2 percent from theatre box offices. It was also financed through membership fees (see Tomoff 2006, pp. 49-50).

34 Cited from Rothstein, "The Quiet Rehabilitation". Because the royalty money was paid on the grounds of a repertoire list, it was not uncommon that artists performed other songs but delivered lists with the "right" selection to avoid trouble with the officials, see Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*.

35 Heino Pedusaar, *Tardunud helide maailm*, Tallinn: Koolibri, 2007.

36 Salumets, *Rockrapsoodia*.



were released in the west and circulated via cassettes within the music loving community. Many people had relatives in the west who sometimes provided their Soviet kin with new music on cassette or vinyl LPs. The citizens of Tallinn were able to watch and listen to Finnish TV and radio, and new music was recorded from these sources and re-recorded later by other people. It was not unusual for Estonian artists to re-record contemporary hits with Estonian texts and this way new hits were spread among listeners.<sup>37</sup> In the 1970s, Estonia had a healthy *estrada* and VIA scene, this music was played on TV and radio. Trend consciousness in music was accompanied with the western heritage that was reflected in fashion, cuisine or architecture. For many people in the Soviet Union, Estonia and the Baltic States generally embodied western culture. These republics were the “Soviet West”. When Yurchak writes about the “imaginary West” in Soviet culture as a non-reachable illusionary space, the Baltic republics were the physical embodiment of those imaginings.<sup>38</sup> This imagery was supported by the Estonian self-isolation and distance from Soviet cultural life: Soviet music, theater or literature was not particularly popular in Estonia during the Soviet era and people preferred to read books or newspapers in their mother tongue. The only notable exception were Soviet films, which were consumed via state TV.

The first Soviet Estonian artist to achieve huge

37 For instance, Eurovision winners were often re-recorded already on the night the song won the contest and played on the radio already the next day. The covering of western pop hits was interpreted by Estonian artist as a mission to introduce fresh music to the Estonian audience and regarded as resistance to Soviet cultural policy. See Margo Vaino and Jaak Urmet, *Tühjad pihud: Gunnar Grap-si elu ja muusika*, Tallinn: Kirjastus Pegasus, 2013; T. Vahter, “Karuks istus vangitornis...” 1980 - aasta, *mis raputas Eestist*, Tallinn: OÜ Hea Lugu ja Tarmo Vahter, 2015.

38 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.

popularity in the Soviet Union was Georg Ots, an opera and *estrada* singer. Georg Ots’ success in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated to the Russian concert agencies that an accent and western style can be an exotic bonus that draws an audience all over the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Later in 1974, in Tallinn, the band *Apelsin* was established. *Apelsin* played a mixture of country, rock’n’roll and *estrada* but nevertheless embodied for Russian music fans western rock music.<sup>40</sup> As the long-time road manager of the band, Aare Nahk, told me “*Apelsin* has always toured in Russia” and probably they were the first Estonian band to enter Soviet concert halls. In the early 1980s, another band, *Fix*, started to tour Russia, having their first concert in Leningrad performing together with Valerii Leont’ev and other *estrada* stars. The self-isolation of the Estonian music scene is well reflected by the recollections of *Fix*’s manager Alar Madisson: “We had no idea about Russian music whatsoever. We did not know Leont’ev at all. After the concert we understood that he was a first class star in Russia.”<sup>41</sup>

The phenomenon of the Estonian invasion can be seen in the context of changes in Soviet cultural policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As Christine Evans demonstrates in her article about Soviet mass culture, in that period, officials began to look for new concepts of entertainment.<sup>42</sup> New shows appeared on TV that included music and comedy. After Khrushchev’s “Thaw”, after the détente and the stabi-

39 Interestingly, Georg Ots was also immensely popular in Finland, being probably the only Soviet *estrada* artist who was regularly able to perform in a capitalist country. See Kulle Raig, *Saaremaa valss: Georg Otsa elu*, Tallinn: Varrak, 2002.

40 Troitskii, *Back in the USSR*, p. 117.

41 Interview in Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011.

42 Christine Evans, “Song of the Year and Soviet Mass Culture in the 1970s”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 12 (3), 2011, pp. 617-645.

lization of society and increase in prosperity, Soviet people looked for a new kind of entertainment. Western music appeared on Soviet TV and radio programs and people apparently wanted more.<sup>43</sup>

As apparent from interviews and written sources, TV shows like *Song of the Year* or *Little Blue Flame* (*Goluboi Ogonek*) opened the door for the success of Estonian music, and for new genres of music in general. Especially a performance in *Goluboi Ogonek* guaranteed success and concert bookings all over the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> These shows were aired on Central Television and watched throughout the whole country. *Song of the Year* and similar shows created a framework that could rapidly be filled with new content once censorship weakened in the second half of the 1980s, and which could (and did) transition quite seamlessly to post-Soviet Russian television.<sup>45</sup> This observation can be generally applied to the whole Soviet entertainment sector. The existence of western mass culture could not be denied anymore and officials attempted to offer a Soviet equivalent to western music, fashion or TV-entertainment, all of which helped to enable the later success of “domestic” western music. Anne Veski believes that she was discovered when Central TV showed a film in which she performed. She argues that Estonian music was “exotic” for Soviet people, and it was more oriented to western pop and rock than towards ordinary Soviet *estrada* or VIA music.<sup>46</sup> Musicians from *Fix* told me that they were even told not to sing in Russian but in Estonian or English. “If we wanted to have Russian music we would have booked a Russian artist”, one manager told them. “We

were different”, Alar Madisson told me, “We dressed differently than Russian bands and we had a real western-style stage show. One of our best tricks was when the guitarist ran to the edge of the stage and then slid on his knees beneath the piano while playing a solo. That drove people mad”.<sup>47</sup> When looking at videos on Youtube it appears that Estonian bands were visually remarkably different from the typical Soviet *estrada* artists. They tended to move around more on stage, wore western style stage costumes and in the case of *Apelsin* or *Fix* featured humor and irony into their shows.

In the early 1980s several Estonian artists toured (*gastrolirovali* in Russian) continuously in Russia. They performed either solo concerts or in huge gala concerts with other artists. “A gala concert was an easy job,” comments Rein Lang, a former functionary of the Young Communist League *Komsomol*, “You performed two songs but got paid for a full length concert”.<sup>48</sup> Specific to Soviet show business was that artists often had to perform several concerts a day over a period of three or four days. “When modern rock bands boast that they perform over forty concerts a year then I just laugh. We performed seventy concerts in a month,” told Arne Nahk from *Apelsin*.<sup>49</sup> Tõnu Aare, the singer of *Apelsin* opines that the record of the band was seventy-two concerts in eighteen days in Ukraine.<sup>50</sup> Alar Madisson told me that the Estonian record is held by Jaak Joala who in the mid-1980s performed twelve gala concerts in one day in Moscow, switching between two stadiums with a bus.<sup>51</sup> Not only was the workload of Estonian performers big, the distances they had to cross were huge as well. During

43 Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*.

44 Evans, “Song of the Year”, p. 620; Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 165.

45 Evans, “Song of the Year”, p. 620.

46 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 149.

47 Interview with Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011.

48 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 156.

49 Interview with Arne Nahk, 6 July 2010.

50 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 163.

51 Interview with Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011.

one season that lasted several months a band could have performed in the Far East, Central Asia, Ukraine and the Caucasus, constantly travelling by planes and trains.

By the mid-1980s an un-official hierarchy among members of the Estonian invasion had formed.<sup>52</sup> All my informants agree that the most popular Estonian artist in the Soviet Union was Jaak Joala. "Jaak Joala was number one. Then there was a huge gap and then came Anne Veski and Tõnis Mägi. And then the rest," explained members of *Apelsin*. "Jaak Joala was worshipped like a god in Russia. He did not even walk three steps, he had always a white Volga<sup>53</sup> to transport him," remembered Arne Nahk.<sup>54</sup> "Jaak Joala is damned talented. Of course he was successful," said Väino Land.<sup>55</sup> There is also an assumption that Soviet concert agencies were looking for non-Russian performers to have variety in their program and consciously promoted Jaak Joala.

The role of *Roskontsert* and its boss Felix Katz in the success of Estonian artists in the Soviet Union is undisputable.<sup>56</sup> However, not only *Roskontsert* had a commercial interest in the relationship. All Estonian artists and bands successful in the Soviet Union had developed strategies and made business partners in show business. "Every band had its own contact person in *Roskontsert*, *Goskontsert* and *Sovkontsert*. Details were kept secret and not

shared", Väino Land told me.<sup>57</sup> These contacts were instrumental for both promotion and bookings. Simultaneously, the Estonian Philharmony and its director Oleg Sapoznin organized concerts and tours using their own contacts with other Soviet concert agencies. But the initiative of bands was tolerated. "We allowed them to do what they wanted," commented Oleg Sapoznin.<sup>58</sup>

Such liberty and different business partners combined with stylistic differences were the reason why Estonian bands built their fan bases in the big cities like Moscow or Leningrad. While *Magnetic Band* or *Fix* were clearly rock oriented then *Radar*, for example, with its experimental sound were able to draw an audience looking for something different. Jaak Joala's romantic image was contrasted with the Kuldne Trio semi-vulgar stage show, Anne Veski as the more or less classic diva was popular with older audiences, whereas Kare Kauk's youthful disco appearance made her popular among young Russian and Ukrainian girls. Oleg Sapoznin argued that the variations in audience preferences were taken into account when tours featuring several different styles of bands were organized.<sup>59</sup>

Management skills and informal networks were of great importance for the success of Estonian artists but probably even more important was the music and performance. "You cannot fool a Russian audience," told a band member of *Fix*. "They recognize immediately when you perform in a half-hearted way. Either you are 100% committed or people just leave. We always left the stage covered with sweat." The selection of songs and orchestration of the stage choreography were careful-

52 The list of the bands associated with the Estonian invasion is relatively short, including artists like Anne Veski, Jaak Joala, Tõnis Mägi and the Magnetic Band, Vitamiin, Laine, Fix, Radar, Mahavok, Kuldne Trio, Nemo. Most bands operated under the Estonian Philharmony.

53 Soviet elite car.

54 Interview with Arne Nahk, 6 July 2010.

55 Interview with Väino Land, 4 December 2012.

56 The controversial nature of Mr. Katz needs additional research. When Estonian artists praise him as a great friend of the Estonian *estrada* (see Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 163) then Oleg Sapoznin told me that Mr. Katz was just exploiting artists and the Estonian Philharmony refused to work with him (Interview with Oleg Sapoznin, 11 March 2013).

57 Interview with Väino Land, 4 December 2012.

58 Interview with Oleg Sapoznin, 11 March 2013.

59 Interview with Oleg Sapoznin, 11 March 2013.

ly discussed and planned.<sup>60</sup> “When we had a short slot in a gala concert we usually performed four or five songs. *Fix* always started with a melodious tune, the next one was faster and the culmination of the performance was a rock song. The last song was slower, usually reggae, we cooled people down and prepared them for the next artist.”

Adopting a western style, using personal contacts and strong commitment may show *how* Estonian artists reached their popularity. However, it does not tell us *why* they were interested in having an artistic career outside of their home republic. This aspect will be discussed in the next section.

### **We have played in every collective farm already...**

“You know why we went to perform in Russia?” asked Alar Madisson. And raising three fingers, he explained “Because of travelling, money and fame. We had achieved everything possible in Estonia, played in every club and village several times already. Russia was a new territory for us, the possibility to travel and see new places”, he added.<sup>61</sup> During the short period of the Estonian invasion, Estonian artists literally performed in every corner of the former Soviet Union, even in places difficult or impossible to reach. As entertainers, they performed often in so-called closed cities, industrial centers where one needed special permission to enter. Members of *Apelsin* told me how they toured the Russian Far East starting their tour in Anadyr, the administrative center of Chukotka. *Apelsin* performed in cities in the border area, also often closed in the Soviet era.<sup>62</sup> Several of these regions had very

little or no tourist infrastructure and in many cases still lack it. Apart from the permissions, for an average Soviet citizen it was complicated to buy plane tickets to these destinations because local enterprises usually booked the flights for their own workers. As for musicians, travel arrangements were made by concert agencies and therefore artists were able to enjoy the privilege of visiting the remote regions.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Estonians also performed in holiday resorts on the coast of the Black Sea or in the cities of Central Asia. The best artists like Anne Veski, *Fix* or *Magnetic Band* were in some rare cases able to perform in other socialist countries or friendly African and American states like Cuba, Zambia or Zimbabwe.<sup>64</sup> Depending on personal contacts within the concert agencies, many artists developed a certain regional focus: While *Apelsin* never performed in Central Asia then *Fix* was rarely seen in the Caucasus and the paths of touring Estonians often did not cross at all.

A serious motivating factor for touring the Soviet republics was of course money. As mentioned above, according to the centrally fixed tariffs performers always received the same salary independent of the length of the concert and audience numbers. Touring actively and performing several times a day, high category musicians were able to earn substantial amounts of money. Avo Ulvik, who toured Russia for a long period explains that in Estonia as a professional musician on an Estonian Philharmony payroll he earned one hundred rubles a month whereas during the tours he earned nearly 700 rubles, i.e. seven times more.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, additional income was earned with illegal performances in clubs and private parties or at unofficial unregistered (or

60 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 158.

61 Interview with Alar Madisson, 6 April 2011.

62 Collective interview, 6 October 2011.

63 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 171.

64 E.g. Salumets, *Rockrapsoodia*, p. 238.

65 Rinne, *Laulev revolutsioon*, p. 172.



*khaltura*) concerts where local cultural workers split the profit of the evening with the artists. Rock singer and drummer Gunnar Graps organized several tours where most concerts were *khaltura*.<sup>66</sup> Apart from the music, Estonian artists found other possibilities to make money. Rein Lang tells that touring artists made a profit from the Soviet shortage economy by bringing along fashionable clothes and other commodities from Estonia and selling them in remote Russian towns.<sup>67</sup> Very often when Estonian artists performed in closed industrial cities they were able to obtain imported goods like Finnish boots, etc. These were purchased in large quantities and brought back to Estonia to sell on the black market.<sup>68</sup> It is generally agreed that by intensive touring one was able to earn enough money to build a house or purchase a car.<sup>69</sup>

Last but not least, it was important to be part of the large scale show business, to perform for huge audiences. Anne Veski recalls: "In Russia you feel like a star. In Estonia you are just a singer."<sup>70</sup> Artists of the Estonian invasion performed on a level that was unthinkable in Estonia. A major part of the *Fix* folklore were the concerts in Omsk where the band performed twice a day each time for 20,000 people. Anne Veski's biggest concert drew 36,000 listeners.<sup>71</sup> The experience of performing in front of a huge mass of people makes the artist emotional even today, two decades later. "You know what is the biggest kick? You flip your fingers and 10,000 people flip their fingers. Then you say 'Oooo!' and 10,000 people repeat it", told Alari Madisson. Huge concerts were accompanied by life in luxurious hotels, fancy cars and

the worship of fans. This all built an emotional link with the Russian music scene and the country itself, an affection that several artists felt even when we recorded interviews.

## Conclusion

In February 2010 Estonia was embroiled in a small scandal. The president of Estonia sent an invitation to Anne Veski to attend a reception in honor of the anniversary of the Estonian Republic. During the reception the diva was supposed to receive a medal of honor. However, Anne Veski turned down the invitation because she was booked for a series of concerts in Russia. As she explained, contracts were signed six months ago and there was no possibility to change the dates. The Estonian social media was full of angry comments that accused Anne Veski of unpatriotic behavior. Anne Veski is currently the only Estonian artist actively performing in Russia. In 1993 managers of former famous Estonian bands organized a meeting with representatives of a Russian show business firm in Moscow's Estonian embassy, with the aim to restore the former fruitful relationship. It turned out to be a fiasco. The time was over and Russian promoters were no longer interested in Estonian artists.

It is surprising that the second smallest Soviet republic by territory and the smallest by size of population left such a lasting legacy on Soviet and post-Soviet culture. The period of the Estonian invasion was short and the number of singers and groups limited, but the artists and songs are still remembered in many former Soviet republics. The popularity of Estonian artists offers a possibility to look behind the state controlled media and concert organizations. The Estonian invasion was not only the outcome of the individual ambitions of the

66 Ibid., pp. 152-3.

67 Ibid., pp. 156-7.

68 Ibid., p. 181.

69 Ibid., pp. 183; 189.

70 Ibid., p. 182.

71 Ibid., p. 160.

musicians, but closely related to changes in the larger political and cultural setting. With a closer reading it appears that Soviet culture and its structures were not so strictly controlled and manipulated by the state, but full of contradictions and ambivalence. First of all, the methods and policies of the Soviet cultural and media institutions were not only ideological. Behind the slogans of educating the masses and influencing people's political views existed a culture industry with the aim to make a profit and reach a bigger audience by offering a wide range of entertainment. For that purpose Estonian music was the substitute for the existing "imaginary West". Artists were not subordinated to strict control that determined their appearance and music, as is believed. It is apparent that musicians were able to manipulate official regulations and pursue their own interests, whether musical or financial. The agency of performers and mercantile politics of the Union of Composers, philharmonies or TV stations demonstrate the "deeper paradox" of Soviet life, the multiple sides and layers of Soviet culture. The paradox becomes deeper considering that most artists who were popular in the Soviet Union participated as leading figures in the Singing Revolution of the 1990s, recording several important patriotic songs. I believe that the analysis of the Estonian musical invasion helps us to understand how the presumably highly regulated and centrally controlled Soviet society functioned on an unofficial level. In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a short debate about whether the Soviet Union can be discussed in terms of the existence of civil society or not. In this discussion, anthropologists

introduced a broader definition than political studies scientists.<sup>72</sup> A civil society in socialism means that people were able to find spheres where they were able to make their own decisions and manipulate or question official ideologies and practices. As it appears, Soviet people and institutions had developed a wide range of strategies and practices to follow interests other than building socialism. Besides implementing the social plan, concert organizers were interested in profits, artists in money, glamour and fame. The complexity of the brief period of the Estonian musical invasion can help us to contemplate the nature of Soviet society and its structures beyond the spheres of music and culture.

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72 Chris Hann and Elisabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, London: Routledge, 1996.

# Between E and U: Alfred Schnittke, Popular Culture and Serious Music in Late Soviet Socialism (1968–1982)

by Boris Belge

## Abstract

During the 1970s, highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture began to approach each other in the Soviet Union again. Alfred Schnittke, then one of the most famous Soviet composers, even proclaimed «bridging the gap» between both worlds as his life's goal. This essay contextualizes Schnittke's work and biography in a broader social and cultural development framework of late Socialism. I argue that during a short period in the 1970s, different groups and generations tried to get into contact with each other. As a main protagonist of this movement, Schnittke eventually gained reputation and success among a wide range of concertgoers.

**Keywords:** music, late socialism, highbrow culture, lowbrow culture, Alfred Schnittke.

Music is not only an acoustic phenomenon. It also has a social meaning, fostering bonds between different people grouping around common musical practices.<sup>1</sup> Music can be used to distinguish oneself from other social groups and practices. Accordingly, scholars often claim that “culture” is no single entity but divided into a “highbrow” and “lowbrow” form. The German language acknowledges this theory by splitting the musical world<sup>2</sup> into “E” (*ernst*, serious) and “U” (*Unterhaltung*, popular). Whereas “U” refers to music whose only purpose appears to be pleasure and distraction, “E”-music allegedly aims at “higher” values such as cultural knowledge and intellectual skills. Talking about “E” and “U” is a social operation, separating “higher” from “lower” cultural practices. This distinction emerged during the twentieth century all over Europe and several protagonists from

the “E”-camp used it frequently.<sup>3</sup> Advocates of E-music as well as U-music had some good arguments on their side. U-music provided the cultural commodity for the masses who were not able to make sense of the often elitist compositions of Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, Paul Hindemith and others. Although heavily criticized as dichotomous and simplistic, talking about “E” and “U” remains widespread in the cultural studies.

In the Russian Empire, musical education had been largely influenced by the German model and continued to be so during Soviet times.<sup>4</sup>

3 Cf. Friedrich Geiger and Frank Hentschel, “Vorwort”, *Zwischen “U” und “E”: Grenzüberschreitungen in der Musik nach 1950*, eds. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 7–9 and the contributions by Tobias Janz (pp. 85–103) and Helmut Rösing (pp. 157–173) in the same volume. In Germany, especially after the Second World War, Theodor Adorno and his disciples were among the most important advocates of “E”-music. They insisted that modern music could help overcome the Nazi past. Among others: Frieder Reininghaus, “Das Neue kommt besonders vertrackt: Kohärenzen und Divergenzen zwischen politischen und ästhetischen Avantgarden”, *Musikkulturen in der Revolte: Studien zu Rock, Avantgarde und Klassik im Umfeld von 1968*, ed. Beate Kutschke, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008, pp. 25–39, here pp. 29–36. Theodor W. Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle”, *Quasi una fantasia*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 365–437 and Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*, Reinbek (Hamburg): Rowohlt 1968.

4 The conservatory of Saint Petersburg was largely

1 Christian Kaden, *Soziale Horizonte von Musik: Ein kommentiertes Lesebuch zur Musiksoziologie*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006; Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middleton, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, pp. 130–144.

2 I use the term musical world as an analytical concept first described by H.S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, see. H.-J. Ziemer, *Die Moderne hören: Das Konzert als urbanes Forum 1890–1940*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2008, pp. 23–25.

Therefore, speaking of “E” and “U” was common practice in the Soviet music discourse. However, on the ideological level, Socialist Realism demanded the dissolution of “elitist” and “popular-decadent” conceptualizations of culture in favor of Soviet mass culture. Fighting “elitist” or “formalist” art was a Soviet reason of state. Socialist Realism, which became an authoritative doctrine in the 1930s, demanded composers and musicians to address their works to the masses. For them, formalism (*l’art pour l’art*) was the main enemy.<sup>5</sup> In theory, the difference between “E” and “U” ceased to exist after the establishment of Socialist Realism in the Soviet cultural sphere and was only attributed to the capitalist world.<sup>6</sup> Does it make sense then to speak of “E” and “U” when analyzing the Soviet musical world? It seems to be remarkably different from the musical world of federal Germany or France where the fierce distinction between “E” and “U” became even sharper in the course of the twentieth century. The “E/U”-distinction is a powerful tool when analyzing the practical level of Soviet music production. As we will see, the well-known disjunction between composers of “serious” classical music (symphonies, operas, chamber music) and composers of *estrada* (popular songs) often persisted, regardless of all efforts to abandon them. What is more, the taste of

cultural elites never ceased to resemble typical bourgeois favors: They overtly favored classical music. The most important institution, i.e. the Composers’ Union of the USSR (*Sojuz kompozitorov SSSR*), continued to have departments for both serious and popular music (*estrada*), but the asymmetry in the treatment of the two fractions is obvious.<sup>7</sup> Most of the official debates were concerned with problems of serious music. The publication practice of the union highlighted the persisting distinction between “E” and “U” as well. The official (academic) journal *Sovetskaia muzyka* (Soviet Music, 1933–1992) published articles on music history, music aesthetics, reviews of musical works, event announcements and much more. It addressed academic and musically educated readers who were familiar with musicological terminology. The journal’s purpose was to communicate the current state of musical development and ideological demands to these people. In contrast, *Muzykal’naia zhizn’* (Music life, 1957 et seq.) which was published by the Composers’ Union in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, addressed a broader readership.<sup>8</sup> Established during the Thaw era the “critical-publicist, illustrated” journal tried to portray musical life in general. It was a direct response to the growing popularity of jazz and beat among young Soviet people and aimed at propagating the richness and diversity of classical music in an understandable way. We cannot ignore that there actually *were* two camps. The Soviet musical world of the 1950s and 1960s often was separated between composers of symphonies, chamber music and operas on the one side and composers of

dominated by German professors in the 19th century. Musical theory relied on the works of Adolph Marx, cf. Dorothea Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und der sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 1, Laaber: Laaber, 2008, p. 117.

5 On Socialist Realism in music see Marina Frolova-Walker, “The Glib, the Bland, and the Corny: An Aesthetic of Socialist Realism”, *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America*, eds. Roberto Illiano et al., Turnhout: Brepols 2009, pp. 403–423. A common and widespread polemic against formalism is G[rigorii] Shneerson, *O muzyke zhivoi i mertvoi*, Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1964.

6 *Sovetskaia muzyka* even had its own section of articles analyzing and polemicizing the capitalist musical world which was called “Crisis of Bourgeois Music” (*Krizis burzhuasnoi muzyki*).

7 Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939–1953*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 37.

8 Both the journal and newspaper were printed by the publishing house *Kompozitor*.

songs and *estrada* music on the other side.<sup>9</sup>

A common thesis holds that the distinction between “E” and “U” is a key phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of elite and popular cultures which wanted to distinguish themselves using particular social and cultural practices.<sup>10</sup> According to systems theory, social systems tend to build subsystems with their own modes of operation.<sup>11</sup> In this specific case the two subsystems of high and low culture began to approach each other not in the heyday of Socialist Realism, but only in the 1970s. There was no more differentiation, but mutual interaction between different social groups, ideas, norms and practices. As the Soviet Union reached a historical peak in urbanization and industrialization, “E” and “U” were moving towards each other.

In order to elucidate the melting of “E” and “U” since the 1970s, I would like to refer to the biography and work of Alfred Schnittke (1934–98). He is widely considered to be one of the most renowned Russian composers after Dmitri Shostakovich among musical enthusiasts as well as academic experts.<sup>12</sup>

9 Ingo Grabowsky, “Motor der Verwestlichung: Das sowjetische Estrada-Lied 1950-1975”, *Osteuropa* 62 (4), 2012, pp. 21–35; Michel Abeßer, “Between Cultural Opening, Nostalgia and Isolation – Soviet Debates on Jazz between 1953 and 1964”, *Jazz behind the Iron Curtain*, eds. Gertrud Pickhan and Rüdiger Ritter, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 99–116. See also the article by Aimar Ventsel in this volume.

10 Friedrich Geiger and Frank Hentschel relate the usage of “E” and “U” to a tradition rooted in the twentieth century. Geiger and Hentschel, “Vorwort”, pp. 7–8.

11 Frank Becker and Elke Reinhardt-Becker, *Systemtheorie: Eine Einführung für die Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001, pp. 35–6.

12 Laurel E. Fay, “Alfred Schnittke: Shostakovich’s Heir”, *Upbeat for the Los Angeles Philharmonic* 7 (3), 1990, pp. 8–9; Yulia Kreinin, “Alfred Schnittke as the Successor to Dmitri Shostakovich: To Be Yourself in Soviet Russia”, *Schostakowitsch und die Folgen: Russische Musik zwischen Anpassung und Protest*, eds. Ernst Kuhn, Jascha Nemtsov and Andreas Wehrmeier, Berlin: Ernst Kuhn 2003, p. 161.

Recent musicological research highlighted Schnittke’s importance for the Soviet musical world of the 1970s and 1980s. His music and thought influenced many Soviet classical composers during the time of late socialism. Concerts including Schnittke’s works guaranteed a large audience.<sup>13</sup> His biography is typical for a group of so-called “nonconformist” composers who were educated in the 1960s under the impression of the ongoing Thaw.<sup>14</sup> After graduating, they experienced setbacks and problems during the 1970s. These composers were neither overt dissidents nor fully integrated in the Soviet musical system. Instead, they lived under complex and often inconsistent circumstances: benefitting from state protectionism over the arts but opposing “official” cultural demands.<sup>15</sup> This group tried to build a musical world of its own which neither stood apart from official structures nor was completely integrated in them.<sup>16</sup>

### Alfred Schnittke on popular music, popular music in Schnittke’s works

For Alfred Schnittke, things were quite clear: The formal border between “E” and “U” was unproductive and it was the task of contem-

13 Peter John Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 26–67.

14 Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina and Edison Denisov were later known as the “Moscow Troika”, but usually composers such as Arvo Pärt or Valentin Silvestrov are also added to this group.

15 Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical*, pp. 179–216; William Norbert Quillen, *After the End: New Music in Russia from Perestroika to the Present*, Berkeley, PhD University of California, 2010.

16 Gábor T. Rittersporn, Jan C. Behrends and Malte Rolf, “Open Spaces and Public Realm: Thoughts on the Public Sphere in Soviet-Type Systems”, *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs*, eds. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003, pp. 423–453; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 126–158.



porary composers to bridge this gap. In an interview with Alexander Ivashkin, a longtime friend and musician, Schnittke said:

"It is one of my life's goals to bridge the gap between serious [E] and popular [U] music, and even if it breaks my neck."<sup>17</sup>

Schnittke was fully aware of the dangerous aspects of this approach: It could result in disregard by fans of rock and jazz and refusal as "trivial" or "banal" by his composer colleagues. But his fear was without cause: In fact his composition reflected a changed notion of culture that arose in late Soviet socialism.

During his life, Alfred Schnittke gave countless interviews and talks which are an illuminating source for his self-appropriation and the interpretation of his works. Alfred Schnittke and his colleagues were surrounded by a musical world in which classical music had already lost its hegemony as the dominant form of musical art. It also did so in the Soviet Union – not because of Socialist Realism, but because of newly emerging musical forms like jazz and especially rock.<sup>18</sup> Schnittke recognized the growing role of these developments when he stated that there was

[...] again one different sphere which comes into the museum from the standard outside world – the quasi-jazz, all this rockform music –, I am not sure if all this is living at all [...].<sup>19</sup>

17 Alexander Iwaschkin, "'... und wenn es mir den Hals bricht': Zum Gedenken an Alfred Schnittke", *Musik-Texte: Zeitschrift für neue Musik* 17, 1999, pp. 27–8. My translations from German into English.

18 Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985*, Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010; Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; Michael E. Urban and Andrei Evdokimov, *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture, and Community in Unsettled Times*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004.

19 Alfred Schnittke, *Über das Leben und die Musik: Gespräche mit Alexander Iwaschkin*, Düsseldorf: Econ,

This quote is interesting because here Schnittke revealed his conception of "E" and "U." The "standard outside world" consisted of all everyday surrounding influences like popular music. On the contrary, classical music already became a "museum". Following Schnittke, this museum conserves and exhibits the past. In another interview, Schnittke seems to see his musical home, the world of classical music, as a fortress. Waves repeatedly pound against this fortress. They take parts of the stronghold with them, reshape it, but abate quickly as well. Schnittke thinks of jazz and operetta as two such waves:

*Now we are dealing with the third wave [besides jazz and operetta]. It is also fading. Rock has its function, like jazz and operetta had, and so it will be in future times.*<sup>20</sup>

In the following, Schnittke even pathologized rock music. Responding to Ivashkin's question, if rock music had something pathological to it, he said:

*Yes, sure. Rock features many interesting things. However, I cannot watch these grimace-makers (Fratzenschneider) on television anymore who pretend to be in extremist situations. This has become almost unbearable.*<sup>21</sup>

Schnittke apparently had severe problems with his attempts to link "E"- and "U"-music. He constantly refrained from defining his own place in Soviet music culture. His statements are full of inconsistencies. For him the "grimace-makers" were no serious members of the league of musicians. He strictly tried to

1998, p. 243.

20 Ibid., p. 244.

21 Ibid., p. 245.

distinguish himself from them. His statements emphasize the confusion and disorientation inside the classical musical world caused by new notions of popular culture such as rock and pop. However, composers born in the 1930s already lived during times in which popular music had an indisputable significance. If they did not want to be left behind new musical trends, they had to incorporate at least some new stylistic devices. This kind of composition could hope to reach a larger number of listeners.

A quick survey of Schnittke's works already reveals the influence of popular music styles and their importance. Both his first symphony and his piano concerto, belonging to the major genres of Schnittke's oeuvre, are riddled with jazz, rock and other *Gebrauchsmusik* (music for use). The composer used a technique he called "polystylism". Schnittke first used this term in October 1971. He then held a lecture at a meeting of the International Music Council, a sub-organization of UNESCO. The lecture was titled "Polystylistic tendencies in contemporary music".<sup>22</sup> Here, Schnittke explained how difficult it was to play the allusion game in contemporary composition:

*[...] it may be that the adoption of a polystylistic method reduces the absolute, non-associative value of the work, creating the danger of self-consciously striving for effect. There are also greater demands placed on the general cultural knowledge of the listener, who must be able to recognize the interplay of styles as something done deliberately.*

22 "Polistilisticheskie tendentsii v sovremennoi muzyke". Earliest print: *Muzyka v SSSR* 2, 1988, pp. 22–24; Valentina Kholopova and Evgeniia Chigareva, *Alfred Schnittke: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva*, Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1990, pp. 327–331; English translation: Alexander Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 87–91.

At the same time, Schnittke admitted indisputable benefits of this method:

*But in spite of all the complications and possible dangers of the polystylistic method, its merits are now obvious. It widens the range of expressive possibilities, it allows for the integration of 'low' and 'high' styles, of the 'banal' and the 'recherche' – that is, it creates a wider musical world and a general democratization of style.*<sup>23</sup>

According to Schnittke, polystylism allowed the incorporation of formerly neglected styles. Composing this way, these stylistic levels gained a new meaning. One example of this is Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No.1 (1977). According to Schnittke, it begins with a "banal" theme in thirds that imitates a children's song.<sup>24</sup> Rubbing seconds of the two solo violins then dissolve this theme. The main attraction of the concerto is concealed in the rondo's tango. On the one hand, this passage features typical elements of a tango, but it is alienated in instrumentation: a harpsichord plays the leading role, the venerable instrument of baroque masters like Handel or Bach. Schnittke deliberately merges several stylistic levels and musical languages. According to him, the intonated tango was his grandmother's favorite.<sup>25</sup> When writing about his work, Schnittke explained:

*Every banal passage [...] has a fatal function in this piece: it interrupts actually every development and triumphs also at the end. In our times where the most audacious and newest devices already seem blunted, the 'banal' gains in a confrontation in this way an expressiveness of a slightly demonic*

23 Ibid., p. 88.

24 Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, pp. 45–47.

25 Jürgen Köchel, *Alfred Schnittke zum 60. Geburts-tag: Eine Festschrift*, Hamburg: Sikorski, 1994, p. 417.

kind. The 'banal' belongs to life and I do not think it is necessarily right that trivial music has been ignored and turned off for many years by the development of avant-garde music. However in my concerto grosso the 'banal' dominates in temporal, but not in spatial terms, but it works quasi from the outside interrupting and destroying. I would like to mention the tango as an example, or the sentimental song at the beginning which recurs again and again and at the end wrecks everything.<sup>26</sup>

Schnittke's quote is remarkable for several reasons. He himself uses the term "banal" for what is called popular music in this paper. For him, the "banal" is the unquestioned center of musical development. The composer does not want to disconnect it from serious music as was the case in the 1950s. Instead, Schnittke integrates the "banal" into the meta-form of the neo-classical:

*So into the framework of a neoclassical concerto grosso I introduced some fragments not consonant with its general style, which had previously been fragments of cinema music [...]. But all of these themes are perfectly consonant with each other [...] and I take them completely seriously.*<sup>27</sup>

However, there actually is an implicit judgment in Schnittke's quotes. He makes this clear in some of his statements. In his mind the "banal" was dangerous because of its simplicity and clichés leading to "paralyzed individuality".<sup>28</sup> Banal music was the "Faustian evil" that masked the true and good.<sup>29</sup> Schnittke

used different styles as tools to express different feelings, situations etc. He shared this functionalist approach with many of his composer colleagues. "Banal", "popular music" had its place in Schnittke's music, but he had a certain hierarchy between the different styles in mind. His use of popular music therefore had its own agenda. It was the result of a theoretical and practical reflection of cultural practices.

### "E", "U" and the *tret'e napravlenie* (third direction)

In the 1970s, "E" and "U" were no clearly distinguishable fractions anymore. Soviet cultural politics contributed to this by committing Soviet composers to write both academic and popular music. The Soviet state forcefully educated its citizens to become cultivated people and demanded its composers to contribute to this project. Even well-known composers of "serious" music like Dmitri Kabalevskii, Dmitri Shostakovich or Georgii Sviridov did not think of themselves as too important to serve "democratic" art and wrote popular music as well.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the 1970s in the Soviet Union saw the rise of a "phenomenon [...], which crossed genres and styles of different levels".<sup>31</sup> One trigger was Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Already in 1971, *magnitizdat* (tapes) copies of a Russian version of the musical circulated. Later, the news broadcast *Vremia* even used one of its themes as a fanfare.<sup>32</sup> Timothy Ryback holds that *Jesus Christ Superstar* was "every-

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, pp. 45-6 (original: Dmitri I. Shul'gin, *Gody neizvestnosti Al'freda Shnitke: Besedy s kompozitorom*, Moskva: Delovaia liga, 1993, pp. 243-4).

<sup>28</sup> Alfred Schnittke, *Über das Leben und die Musik*, p. 201.

<sup>29</sup> Dorothea Redepenning, „Inszenierungen von 'Gut' und 'Böse' in Alfred Schnittkes Instrumen-

talmusik“, *Alfred Schnittke: Analyse, Interpretation, Rezeption*, ed. Amrei Flechsig, Hildesheim: Olms, 2010, pp. 71-91.

<sup>30</sup> Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 2, Laaber: Laaber 2008, p. 699.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*, p. 241.

where" in the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s. According to Ryback, a whole hippie cult emerged around the rock opera. More tolerance towards popular styles seemed to arise among functionaries. In August 1973 the journal *Inostrannaia Literatura* (Foreign Literature) compared *Jesus Christ Superstar* with the works of Dostoevskii and Bulgakov and thereby raised it into the spheres of high culture.<sup>33</sup> Even Shostakovich saw one performance of the musical in 1972 in London and spoke well of it. Successively, more and more composers thought of daring to mingle rock and classical music. A whole series of rock operas respectively classical music with rock-styled passages emerged. This established a movement that is now described as the so-called *tret'e napravlenie* (third direction).<sup>34</sup> Peter Schmelz demonstrated how Aleksandr Zhurbin's rock opera *Orpheus and Eurydice* (*Orfei i Evredika*, first performance 1975) assumed a pioneering role. Until 1979 this work was performed over 800 times in the Soviet Union and celebrated frenetically. The newspaper *Iunost'* (Youth) covered the first performance including an enthusiastic review by Mikhail Provorov which also contributed to the immense success. But Zhurbin's opera was not the only one. Today, Aleksei Rybnikov's *Junos i Avos* is known even better, and many more could be mentioned. Composers of "serious" music who saw themselves as being part of a long tradition starting with Palestrina and Bach could not escape this development. Schnittke himself never missed an opportunity to hear a recording of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.<sup>35</sup> He also asked Zhurbin

to give him a short version of his opera. One example for the merging of rock and classical music is Schnittke's *Requiem* which was composed in 1974/1975.<sup>36</sup> It was written after the death of Schnittke's mother and marks a new step in the development of his use of forms. The requiem was written as stage music for Schiller's *Don Carlos* and shares all attributes of the "classic" catholic requiem. The small instrumental ensemble is boosted by an electric guitar and a drum set, both of which join the ensemble at the end of the Credo. This was a slight provocation: The Christian statement of faith which is performed in a classic choral set culminates in rockbeats. We have no evidence how the auditorium perceived this antinomy. However, Schnittke's biography clearly falsifies the hypothesis that he banalized or mocked Christian values. In the 1980s, Schnittke was baptized and became a member of the Catholic Church. He became part of a newly emerged religious movement in Soviet music and society.<sup>37</sup> His use of rock instruments was also influenced by his family life: His own son Andrei became a rock enthusiast early on and was a typical exponent of Yurchak's "Last Soviet Generation". Schnittke followed this development with interest and attention.<sup>38</sup>

The *tret'e napravlenie* was a very important part of Schnittke's life. On the aesthetic as well as on the biographic level, mutual interaction be-

33 Idem, pp. 149-50.

34 Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987*, Stockholm: Melos Music Literature, 1998, p. 314; Tamara Levaia, *Istoriia otechestvennoi muzyki vtoroi poloviny XX veka*, Sankt-Peterburg: Kompozitor, 2005, p. 202.

35 Peter Schmelz, "'Crucified on the Cross of Mass Culture': Late Soviet Genre Politics in Alexander

Zhurbin's Rock Opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*", *Journal of Musicological Research* 28, 2009, pp. 61-87, here: p. 68. Schmelz recounts a story by Georgii Sviridov, *Muzyka kak sud'ba*, Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2002, p. 151.

36 Aleksandr V. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, London: Phaidon, 1996, p. 34.

37 Natal'ia Gulianitskaia, *Poetika muzykal'noi kompozitsii: teoreticheskie aspekty russkoi duchovnoi muzyki XX veka*, Moskva: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002.

38 Andrei Schnittke collaborated with his father in several musical projects where Alfred Schnittke combined classical and rock elements. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, p. 189.

tween rock and classical music occurred. The composer reflected this development several times and gave his opinion on it. Things were complicated: The statements mentioned above lead to the conclusion that Schnittke had a division in “high” and “low” cultural styles in his mind.

An analysis of Schnittke’s composing techniques should not stop at this point. Put in its wider context, Schnittke’s merging of “E” and “U” can serve as an apt topic for gaining new insights in late Soviet socialism.

### **Music history as social history: New spaces in late socialism**

After Stalin’s death, a growing absence of conflicts dominated the cultural system in the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> The militant battles against elitist and decadent culture of the Stalin era slowed down significantly. Ideological control, aesthetic demands and perception patterns had the chance to reconfigure in a remarkable way. Popular music became the main pace-maker of a new youth movement. The Seventh World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957 initiated an unprecedented cultural exchange ‘across the blocs’.<sup>40</sup> Since these days, jazz was accompanied by beat as a new musical wave. But telling ‘parting-the-iron-curtain-stories’ is not enough.<sup>41</sup> There was no simple transfer

of western norms and practices to the Soviet Union. Instead, an individual culturally informed adoption took place. Socialist singers and groups were as famous and well-known as Bill Hailey. The most famous form of popular music, the *estrada*, oscillated between “‘official’ and ‘lyrical’”, between “Soviet” and “Western” styled songs.<sup>42</sup> For musicians as well as music functionaries, western-style jazz and *estrada* represented a free creative space which was less restricted and formalized in contrast to mass songs or classical music. In addition, composing jazz and *estrada* was very profitable: Jazz musician Oskar Strok for example earned twice as much per year as Tikhon Khrennikov, the chairman of the Composers’ Union.<sup>43</sup>

Jazz and rock attracted musicians and composers because of their wide reach into Soviet society and the relative free space in which they were created. Demographic factors played a role, too. After the end of World War II, the Soviet Union witnessed a baby boom in which the number of births rose explosively from the 1950s to the 1960s.<sup>44</sup> Eastern socialist states therefore faced problems of youth and youth policy on a new qualitative level. Nikita Khrushchev called these young people “builders of communism” who were to overcome the old world. Because of that, issues of education and moral principles were on the agendas of party and state.<sup>45</sup> The path to large-scale repression and violence was closed

39 Dietrich Beyrau, *Intelligenz und Dissens: Die russischen Bildungsschichten in der Sowjetunion 1917–1985*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, p. 156.

40 Kristin Roth-Ey, “‘Loose girls’ on the Loose? Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival”, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilic, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 75–95; Juliane Fürst, “The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev”, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 135–153.

41 Kristin J. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

2011, p. 10.

42 Grabowsky, “Motor der Verwestlichung”, p. 26.

43 Idem, p. 25.

44 Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet baby boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

45 Katharina Barbara Uhl, *Building Communism: The Young Communist League during the Soviet Thaw Period, 1953–1964*, DPhil Oxford, 2013; Fürst, “The Arrival of Spring?”, pp. 135–153.



since the days of Khrushchev. Under Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, cultural policies were dominated by moderate “laissez-faire”. Although functionaries clung to the older discursive pattern such as Socialist Realism, they *de facto* allowed much wider free spaces. This offered musicians new possibilities.<sup>46</sup> Only under this precondition could composers of “serious” music lean towards popular music in the 1970s.

\* \* \*

This article demonstrated that there existed mutual interactions between “E” and “U” on the aesthetic level. One has to admit that it is a commonplace to talk about postmodern style-mixtures in the music of the 1970s,<sup>47</sup> but analyzing specific historical and biographic contexts nevertheless highlights new features of late Soviet socialism. “E” and “U” came closer in new formats like the rock opera. Both “E” and “U” were part of the living environment (*Lebenswelt*) of young people in the Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup> It was nothing special to absorb the “classic European heritage” of Mozart and Beethoven in piano lessons and at the same time to hear the riffs of Pink Floyd, Deep Purple and other rock bands at *Komsomol* parties.<sup>49</sup> The boundary between “E”

and “U” became more blurred than before. Many elements of popular culture such as jazz improvisations became integrated parts of high culture – Schnittke’s first symphony’s second movement has a jazz improvisation in the middle.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, jazz musicians and rockers debated whether their musical styles should meet academic expectations and lamented the accompanying loss of spontaneity. The new concepts and practices of popular culture as well as *tret’e napravlenie* definitely challenged the existing discourse of Socialist Realism. However, the dominating medium in which this process took place was not the written form. Instead, we face a negotiation without words, an often silent adaption towards new demands in cultural production. Not all composers of the Brezhnev era walked over the bridge between “E” and “U.” Composer Sofia Gubaidulina for example insisted on using only “serious” techniques in her compositions and focused on religious material for innovation.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the contact between classic and rock/jazz in the Soviet Union seems to be rather a rendezvous than a long-term union. In the days of Perestroika and after the fall of the Iron Curtain both camps again went their own ways. Schnittke for example moved to Hamburg where he was absorbed by the German classical music context. Compared to the Soviet musical world, the divide between “E” and “U” persisted much stronger in Germany. The phenome-

46 Cf. Boris Belge, “Zwischen Polystilistik und Sozialismus: Die Schnittke-Rezeption in der Sowjetunion 1974–1981”, *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang: Werk und Rezeption Alfred Schnittkes im Kontext ost- und mitteleuropäischer Musikdiskurse*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, Hildesheim: Olms 2013, pp. 155–169.

47 Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, pp. 515–558; Jörn-Peter Hiekel, “Postmoderne’ im Musikdiskurs: Einige Einsichten und Ansichten”, *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 15–35.

48 Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*.

49 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, pp. 207–238. Many of the rock enthusiasts of the 1970s and 1980s probably had classical training in playing the violin or the piano.

50 Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 2, pp. 689–90; Jean-Benoît Tremblay, “Alfred Schnittke and Musical Postmodernism: The First Symphony as Case Study”, *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 93–107.

51 Valentina N. Cholopova and Enzo Restagno, *Sofia Gubaidulina: Monografiia*, Moskva: Kompozitor, 1996, pp. 99–106; Antony Copley, *Music and the Spiritual: Composers and Politics in the 20th Century*, London: Ziggurat Books, 2012; Michael Kurtz, *Sofia Gubaidulina: A Biography*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

non of Schnittke's polystylist music was absorbed by this divide. From now on, he was known again as a "classical" composer and avant-gardist only.<sup>52</sup>

Did Schnittke "break his neck" bridging the gap? Probably not. Against his own fears, Schnittke's ambitions constituted his long-lasting fame. In the 1990s, Schnittke was the most played twentieth-century Russian composer in Germany. Recordings of his works sold very well. His success was not only based on his indisputable tremendous compositional skills. Schnittke felt the *zeitgeist* and knew when to break with elitist musical styles like serialism. In doing so, he responded to an altered perceptual behavior in Soviet musical society. He also noticed the partial reconfiguration of Soviet music life after twenty years of intensive musical exchange between East and West. At the same time, ironically, Schnittke was in some ways a disciple of Soviet-style musical ideology. Although this sounds rather provocative, in contrast to western composers Schnittke addressed his music to larger audiences,

and in this spirit *massovost'* (music for a great audience) was not foreign to him. Of course Schnittke never would have called himself a socialist realist.<sup>53</sup> But it is this special concept of musical composition that so many people, especially in Germany missed. For them, Schnittke remained a composer of the "E"-fraction. It is definitely time to overcome this labeling.

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52 Schnittke's life and work after the fall of the Soviet Union urgently needs further research. Cf. Amrei Flechsig, „Polyperspektivischer Unterricht: Alfred Schnittkes Wirken als Kompositionslehrer“, *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 139–155; R. Flender, „Alfred Shnitke v Gamburg“, *Alfredu Shnitke posviashchaetsia*, Vypusk 4, eds. Alla Bogdanova and Elena Dolinskaia, Moskva: Kompozitor, 2004, pp. 107–109.

53 "Socialist Realism" was in fact more than a matter of taste. Especially for Schnittke's generation of composers it was also a code for detested interferences and annoyances in their compositional work.

# Ways of Life at a Crossroads. Aksënov's *Ostrov Krym* (Island of Crimea)

by Tatjana Hofmann

## Abstract

Aksënov's novel *Ostrov Krym* (Island of Crimea) plays with the idea that Crimea is not a peninsula but an isolated, non-Soviet, liberal island. The narrative tension, centred on the affair of the male and the female main character, asks whether Russia should develop towards the western or the eastern world. Aksënov's novel can be read as part of the underground pop culture in the late Soviet Union as well as a space for discussion of its non-official, desired, demanded or dreaded cultural vectors.

**Keywords:** Aksënov, Crimea, alternative vision, Eastern vs. Western Europe, mass culture and high culture.

The following article addresses aspects of everyday culture in the fictional space of the alternative Crimea. It takes the novel *Ostrov Krym* (Island of Crimea) as an example, tracing some of its references to cultural visions and habits, and the function they carry out for the text structure and the novel's effect. What we find are dominant, historically still popular cultural 'voices' as the two main positions of the novel are caught between the western and the eastern world. The main tension, centered on the affair of the male and the female main character, conveys the traditional question of which way Russia should develop. Both cultural layers and the narrative structure are characterized by antagonisms and ambivalences, combining mass culture and high culture, sympathy and antipathy for the Soviet Union and for Crimea / 'the West', respectively. Using this approach, the novel tries not to romanticize Crimea as a southern, arcadian, perhaps superior place in contrast to the Soviet Union, but as an indispensable part of it – and at the same time as a distorting mirror of the western world. This article tries to participate in the narrative's discussion without coming too close to the proposed cultural concepts. It aims for a close reading which tries to avoid any politically biased labelling of these visions.

## Aspects of popular culture in Vasilii P. Aksënov's *Ostrov Krym* (Island of Crimea)

When exploring popular culture in the late Soviet Union, it is worth taking fictional literature into account as well. By way of condensation and (re-)production of knowledge, fiction can be regarded as a parallel discourse to the empirical world which condenses mass culture, subculture and also the so-called high culture in the case of Russian literature. My preferred terms 'way of life' / 'everyday culture' (in Russian: *byt*) comprise popular culture in the sense of mass culture, and subculture in the sense of alternative culture – their meaning depends on the context as they overlap. In terms of Russian popular culture, we deal with a concept that grew in the second half of the nineteenth century from sympathy for *narodnost'*, the simple folk, peasant life and equitable forms of possessions. While authors like Gertsen, Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov elaborated their utopian socialism in opposition to the tsarist regime, the ideal of justice for all classes has been implemented in the official, state-controlled mass culture in the Soviet Union. In Soviet literature and arts the corresponding aesthetical programme is known as the style of social realism proclaimed in 1934.

The definition of popular culture leads us to a complex history of the term, reaching across Europe and based on its opposition to 'high culture'. In the German-language countries the post-war discourse is determined by scepticism towards the superficial and illusive mass amusement. Within this academic division a post-Herderian interest in mass culture (*Volks-* and *Alltagskultur*) rather emanates from empirical cultural studies, whereas 'high culture', including literature, is investigated mainly by theoretical orientated philologies.<sup>1</sup> While the latter primarily focuses on aesthetics of canonical works, British cultural studies have drawn attention to the social function of text genres outside the official literary canon. They instead belong to youth culture, for example song texts and sex-and-violence novels.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the 1990s this approach was criticized for its naive optimism as mass culture inevitably involves consumerism and ideological appropriation.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the difference between 'high' and 'low' cultures fades away with the increasing usage of plurimedial electronic mass media. In Russia of the twentieth century, literature, even artistically sophisticated literature, often seems to belong to both elite culture and cultural heritage familiar to millions of people such as poems and quotations often known by heart. Due to this culture of reception, the value of published and forbidden books, the density of intertextual references between

self-preserving text systems, and large-scale printing, the "good old" book deserves to be called a Soviet/Russian mass medium of the twentieth century. Thus, literature reflects the typical Russian way of life and, at the same time, reading is part of everyday practices. In addition to that, literature provides potentially polysemantical space for the interaction of cultural signs. Fictional explorations of culture arise when the text creates a semantical space for several cultural 'voices'. The most interesting scenario does not aim to establish a hierarchy of certain messages, but lets the readers instead decide which position they would like to take towards the phenomena presented. As Raymond Williams, one of the cultural studies scholars, writes: "*A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested.*"<sup>4</sup> This battle between inclusion and exclusion remains a trait of culture in general. Not only after the alphabetization and writing campaigns in the Soviet Union, but also before the October Revolution, literature and journalism were the main media of politically controversial opinions on culture for centuries, despite waves of suppression and censorship. Actually, popular culture might be considered as a voice itself in a totalitarian state, as it is partly inside the official discourse and partly outside. The chosen writer and this novel were prominent representatives of a subcultural network of officially hardly acknowledged writers in the late Soviet Union. It was not until after Stalin's death that the first subculture – the so called *stiliagi*<sup>5</sup> – appeared in the Sovi-

1 For a detailed history of the term see: Hermann Herlinghaus, "Populär/volkstümlich/Popularkultur", *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, eds. Karl-Heinz Barck et al., vol. 4, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2002, pp. 832–884.

2 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1957, p. 251.

3 Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Rock, die Konserveativen und die Postmoderne*, Wien: Löcker, 2010 (1992).

4 Raymond Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary" (1958), *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable, London / New York: Verso, 1989, pp. 3–14, here p. 12.

5 The 'stiliagi'-movement was a youth subculture in bigger cities in the USSR from the 1940s until the

et Union. Vasilii P. Aksënov (1932-2009), son of Evgenia Ginzburg, had a dissident background, and lived as a 'stiliaga' in the Soviet Union. This was part of the non-official popular culture, which was primarily available to the youth of the elite and was expressed by literature, too. Together with Viktor V. Erofeev he co-edited the underground almanach *MetrOpol*. After publishing prose like *Kollegi* (*Colleagues*, 1960) and *Zvezdnyi bilet* (*Ticket to the Stars*, 1961) in the magazine *Iunost'*, Aksënov was considered as one of the authors contributing to the *Thaw* (*ottepel'*) and a member of the so called *Shestidesiatniki* movement. Aksënov's texts, which use slang and are not prudish, were read and welcomed by the young generation as an affront against the official aesthetics and values.<sup>6</sup> He turned out to be an author some of whose works had to wait for decades to be published in the Soviet Union and who had to leave his homeland with the consequence that the state withdrew his citizenship in January 1981.<sup>7</sup> This biographical background represents one of the 'cultural voices' in *Ostrov Krym*.<sup>8</sup> The novel's most striking assumption plays with a geographical idea: Crimea is not a peninsula but an island. In addition to that, it assumes an alternative historical development by the suggestion that the Russian civil war ends when the tsarist forces are able to hold on to this southern piece of the old empire. After

the Whites defeated the Red Army in 1920 they preserved an aristocratic Russia which was developing in a capitalist, liberal, economically and politically more successful way than the Soviet Union. This isolated, Swiss-like Crimea stayed neutral during and after World War II. The novel, originally published in *samizdat*, contributed to Aksënov's popularity in Moscow's underground. It might reveal "the author's frustration with the West's gullibility in its relation to the Soviet Union",<sup>9</sup> reflecting the disappointment of the *Shestidesiatniki* and their lack of action. Written in 1979 shortly before his emigration, *Ostrov Krym* first officially appeared in Ann Arbor in 1981 after Aksënov moved to the United States in 1980. In the Soviet Union, it was only published in 1990 in the first issues of the magazine *Iunost'* – the bestseller of the year. First of all, the book was understood as a critique of the Soviet invasion politics. Primarily, Aksënov's fantasy island provokes the stagnated Soviet official culture of the Brezhnev-era with an integrating approval of both pre-revolutionary and western everyday culture. Looking back, the novel anticipates the cultural period after 1985:

*The reordering of popular culture since Mikhail Gorbachev's advent to power in 1985 after the brief interludes of Andropov and Chernenko was marked by unprecedented freedom of expression – the cultural side of glasnost – and a legitimation by the authorities of spontaneously generated culture from below. This brought changes in reading habits, show attendance, film and television viewing, musical styles, and non-structured leisure; the quickening of amateur culture; and a decentralization of cultural life*

1960s. These young people were keen on the American way of life, western music and dance with the tendency to dress in a non-Soviet way and establish their own slang. For more information view the article by Gleb Tsipursky in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Viktor Esipov, "Chetyre zhizni Vasilii Aksenova", *Vasilii Aksenov – odinokii begun na dlinnye distancii*, ed. Viktor Esipov, Moskva: Astrel', pp. 7-18, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Citizenship was returned to him in 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Vasilii Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, Ann Arbor: Ardis 1981; Vassily Aksyonov: *The Island of Crimea*, transl. by Michael H. Heim, New York: Aventura, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Konstantin Kustanovich, *The Artist and the Tyrant: Vassily Aksenov's Works in the Brezhnev Era*, Columbus: Slavica, 1992, p. 37.



through the spread of electronic media. [...] The new popular culture – much of it legalized ‘old’ culture – contained strong currents of iconoclasm, demythologizing, and open irreverence. The ridicule of sacred icons that could previously be voiced only in underground anecdotes, paintings, and songs was now publicly heard. For the first time in memory, nude pictures and obscene lyrics appeared in public places as did heretofore unseen levels of shock and violence in movies and TV. This evoked counter currents of envy, resentment, and hostility.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the novel is an example of a belletristic vision that has become common cultural knowledge, a part of Russian everyday culture. Zoia Boguslavskaia made a similar observation on Aksënov’s use of subcultural oral language: “то ли Аксенов внес в литературу городской молодежный сленг начала шестидесятых, то ли молодежь заговорила языком его героев”.<sup>11</sup> Again, (fictional) slang carries cultural and political connotation in the considered novel as it stands for a new international youth culture (*Iaki*) in Crimea. Together with embodiments of virulent cultural-political ideas by main figures, characters drawn in black-and-white, an action-led dramaturgy, and, in terms of its genre, political tensions, the novel has an entertaining style of a pop-cultural product like a spy novel or political thriller. “Written in the late 1970s, the Crimean novel is a thoroughly fictional assessment of the same period, a parody on a James Bond fantasy.”<sup>12</sup> This impression arises straight from the begin-

ning. In *Ostrov Krym*, popular culture delivers a means for the ‘popping up’ of converse cultural-political ideas advocated by interacting protagonists and by historical coincidence. The nuance of ‘pop-up’, a suddenly imposed proposition, starts with the fictitious, accidentally emerging topography of an island. The narrative proposes that after the October Revolution the Whites fled to Crimea on foot across the frozen sea separating it from the Soviet landmass. The Bolsheviks were not able to follow them because a British vessel, positioned in the Black Sea, shot at the ice, causing it to break under the feet of the pursuers. Therefore, its spatial structure determines the political development of Crimea as well as its economy. Like its extraordinary geography, its wealth seems to emerge of its own accord, when we follow the thoughts of the male protagonist Luchnikov, who introduces us to this place:

‘Откуда все-таки взялось наше богатство?’ – в тысячный раз спрашивал себя Лучников, глядя с фриуэя вниз на благодатную зеленую землю, где мелькали прямоугольные, треугольные, овальные, почковидные пятна плавательных ‘пулов’ и где по вьющимся местным дорогам медленно в больших ‘кадиллаках’ ездил друг к другу в гости зажиточные яки. Аморально богатая страна.<sup>13</sup>

These landscapes appear like an exaggerated image of the prototypical ‘beautiful island’, especially as they form the setting for adventures reminiscent of western political thrill-

10 Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 178.

11 Ibid., p. 8: “Either Aksënov has transferred young people’s slang of the 1960s into literature or the young people have started to speak the language of his protagonists.” (My translation.)

12 Olga Matich, “Vasilii Aksënov and the Literature of Convergence: *Ostrov Krym* as Self-Criticism”, *Slavic Review* 47.4, 1988, pp. 642-651, here p. 643.

13 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, pp. 12-13; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 8: “Where does all our wealth come from? Luchnikov asked himself for the thousandth time, looking down over the land-of-plenty landscape dotted with rectangular, triangular, oval, and kidney-shaped swimming pools and crisscrossed by winding back roads now bearing Cadillacs full of wealthy Yakis to their wealthy Yaki friends. Yes, an immorally rich country.”

ers, and they remain the focus of the novel, regardless of its shifts to Moscow and Paris.

### Dialogical entanglement of the protagonists

The novel's dialogical structure within the triangle Crimea – Moscow – Paris is underpinned by the main characters Andrei Luchnikov and Tat'iana Lunina who have a love affair, and whose interaction embodies the geocultural disruption between the island and the rest of Europe. Both work in the mass media, which is necessary for the dissemination of popular culture: Andrei is the editor-in-chief of a nostalgic magazine promoting the idea of a 'common destiny' with Russia, while Lunina hosts the television programme *Vremia* in Moscow, and later on becomes a spy working for the Soviet Union in Crimea. They are both physical: Like Luchnikov, Lunina is dedicated to sports as a former professional athlete. Luchnikov, the leader of the party *Common Destiny*, represents the majority of the island's population which longs for reunification with the Soviet Union and expects a peaceful transition. He offers a slow and non-violent reunion with the Soviet Union, which initially agrees, but then starts to invade Crimea forcefully, eliminating all opponents. The end of the novel, in particular, is reminiscent of a suspense-packed thriller: Andrei's son manages to escape with his girlfriend and their baby, the symbol of a future reborn. The ending can be interpreted as either a tragic or happy end and, looking at it after the spring of 2014, as anticipatory from both points of view – that of the Russian medial reception (peaceful reunification) and the western one (illegal occupation). Due to the narrative's changing personal point of view we are able to experience that place through the eyes of the protagonists but still from a distant perspective. Both figures can be

called 'experiencing mediums' representing ambivalent cultural concepts around the Russian idea: Luchnikov stands for the pre-Soviet Russian idea with a tendency to sovietize it, and Lunina stands for the Soviet Russian idea with a westernizing tendency. Luchnikov is searching for the Russian 'spirit' but this endeavour is broken by ironic moments; similarly Lunina's quest for the Crimean life with Luchnikov is foiled by her emotional return to her husband in Moscow. The partners complement each other, demonstrating how Soviet order longs for Crimea (Lunina) and how the Crimean order (Luchnikov) feeds a nostalgic attitude towards an ideal Russia 'behind' the Soviet Union. In sum, they contribute to the popularization of Crimea as a place of pleasure and passion, but also as one of unpredictability where fate / the sujet might suddenly change. The narrator takes a relatively outside position in a Bakhtinian sense, allowing us to watch from this perspective a flow of different, even antagonistic 'cultural voices'.<sup>14</sup> The characters rarely speak for themselves in the first person. With the introspection into the protagonists' experiences, the narrator enters and conveys the traits of a specific way of life on Crimea where their ambivalence increases: They are exposed to different everyday cultures in the laboratory of fictional space, transmitting contradictions and overlaps to the reader. While Luchnikov mainly represents the Crimean order by taking it for granted, Lunina is the narration's guide through the Crimean world as a would-be local who in fact remains a stranger. With the help of her often naïve perception, the narrator not only informs the reader about the specifics of life

14 Bakhtin has defined heteroglossy as a plurality of 'voices' without the author's predominance. For further reading: Sylvia Sasse, *Michail Bakhtin zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius-Verlag, 2010, pp. 40-43.

on the island but also provides insight into the richness of the Russian woman's joyful emotional states bordering on dangerous situations – Lunina is a figure of female sacrifice whereas Luchnikov tries to be the superhero.<sup>15</sup>

### **Superman in a simulacrum: Luchnikov's Soviet affair**

Luchnikov's positive and western traits refer to attributes of pop-cultural heroes. As Olga Matich points out, Luchnikov "embodies all the archetypal talents of Aksënov's superman."<sup>16</sup> Having a closer look at a) how Luchnikov is introduced in the novel and b) how his reunion (which is also readable on a political level) with his Soviet affair Lunina is introduced, we witness Luchnikov's role as a figure between pre-Soviet Russia, the Soviet Union and Crimean/western *byt*. First of all, the joy of living on the island embodied by Luchnikov stands for the features of the Crimean way of life such as the desired (Soviet) Russia. This superman is portrayed as a gentleman of past times and benchmark of the island's hybrid culture: He combines physical awareness, personal happiness and spiritual values, although the latter are ironically conveyed as already anachronistic in the 1970s. The wedding of this James Bond-like hero – he meets his wife after being injured during the Hungarian uprising in 1956 – sets an example for a new youth culture.<sup>17</sup> His sexual adventures later on strengthen his quest to remain young, attractive and successful. The very first of the novel's 14 chapters intro-

duces a spectrum of protagonists representing the political and cultural views to be discussed in the course of the novel. "In a typical example of convergence, the Soviet and western 1960s are brought together on the Russian island."<sup>18</sup> We get to know three generations of the Luchnikov family as they meet at grandfather Arsenii's house.<sup>19</sup> The three 'alpha-males' – their names all start with an A – discuss the major political trends on the island and, accordingly, three ways of life: The grandson Anton, who has just returned from a year of travelling the world, lives the hippie-like youth movement called *Iaki* which is opposed to the idea of the reunion with Russia and orientated towards the US;<sup>20</sup> Andrei, in the middle, advocates the reunion with the Soviet Union and the eldest, Arsenii, represents the preservation of the aristocratic way of life on Crimea. Andrei is at the center of the narration. From the very first paragraph on, the narrator puts the reader on the same observation level as himself. Together we look down on the phallic newspaper building – and at the narrator's uncertainty when his book will be published:

*Всякий знает в центре Симферополя, среди его сумасшедших архитектурных экспрессий, дерзкий в своей простоте, похожий на очиненный карандаш, небоскреб газеты 'Русский Курьер'. К началу нашего повествования, на исходе довольно сумбурной редакционной ночи, весной, в конце текущего десятилетия или в начале будущего (зависит от времени выхода книги) мы видим издателя-редактора этой газеты 46-летнего Андрея Арсениевича Лучникова в его личных апартаментах, на 'верхотуре'. Этим советским*

15 Although the novel itself has an extraordinary position and does not resemble any other prose by its writer, Luchnikov is a typical character within Aksënov's oeuvre.

16 Matich, "Vasilii Aksënov and the Literature of Convergence", p. 647.

17 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 30.

18 Matich, "Vasilii Aksënov and the Literature of Convergence", p. 646.

19 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 42.

20 Ibid., p. 24.

словечком холостяк Лучников с удовольствием именовал свой плейбойский пентхауз.<sup>21</sup>

From the outset, the reader is confronted with Luchnikov's sinner ambivalence towards Crimean and Soviet life (managing the newspaper *Russian Courier* and founding the party *Union of Common Destiny*), his hyperbolic male power and his crucial function within the narration. With some self-irony Luchnikov observes how he mistakes a traffic light for a church, disapproves of Simferopol's modern aesthetics, for instance the unusual shape of a church, and misses the feeling of nostalgia in this town. Andrei does not fully appreciate the simulacrum-like visuality and loss of traditional values of material culture and social practices on Crimea. Sticking to the grotesque exaggeration of his dialogical style, the narrator stresses the imaginative character of the world Luchnikov lives in (what reminds us of the theatre stage on which Lunina will end up), hence showing Luchnikov's search for depth and meaning behind the artificial world of commerce and entertainment:

*Вдруг пейзаж стал резко меняться. Лунный профиль Сюрю-Кая значительно растянулся, и показалось, что стоишь перед обширной лунной поверхностью, изрезанной каньонами и щелями клыкастых гор. Ошеломляющая новизна*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 9; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 3: "Everyone knows the *Russian Courier* skyscraper, insolent in its pencil-point simplicity among the wild monuments to architectural self-expression in downtown Simferopol. As our story begins – at the end of a hard night at the teletype machines, a spring night late in the present decade or early in the decade to come (depending on when this book comes out) – we find the publisher-editor of the *Courier*, forty-six-year-old Andrei Arsenievich Luchnikov, in his suite atop the skyscraper. Although he prefers more modest names for it, it is in fact a playboy's penthouse."

*пейзажа! За Волошинским седым холмом вдруг вырос некий базальтовый истукан. Шаг в сторону – из моря поднимается неведомая прежде скала с гротом у подножия... Тогда он вспомнил: Диснейлэнд для взрослых! Он уже где-то читал об этом изобретении коктебельской скучающей администрации. Так называемые 'Аркады Воображения'. Экое свинство – ни один турист не замечает перехода из мира естественного в искусственный: первозданная природа вливается сюда через искусно замаскированные проемы в стенах. Вливается и дополняется замечательными имитациями. Каждый шаг открывает новые головокружительные перспективы. У большинства посетителей возникает здесь особая эйфория, необычное состояние духа. Не забыта и коммерция. Там и сям в изгибах псевдомира разбросаны бары, ресторанчики, витрины дорожных магазинов.<sup>22</sup>*

In this description of a shopping center, by

<sup>22</sup> Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, pp. 44-46; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 48: "Then, abruptly, the landscape began to lose the contours he knew so well. It turned into a moonscape, crisscrossed with canyons and ravines. Unbelievable! Whole new configurations! A basalt boulder rising like an idol from behind a hill. Then two feet away – a completely uncharted hill sloping gently to the water, a grotto at its base ... Only then did he remember. Of course! The municipal board had grown tired of having nothing to do and thought up a Disneyland for adults. Fantasy Arcades they called it, and it was totally obscene! No tourist could possibly distinguish between what was natural and what was artificial; primeval nature made its appearance through skillfully masked openings in special prefabricated walls and was then complemented by remarkable imitations. Every step opened new vertiginous perspectives and vistas. The result in most visitors was a curious stage of being, a kind of euphoria. And that's where business came in. Tucked away in the cozy little corners of this pseudoworld were elegant bistros, boutiques, even whole department stores."

stressing the seductive power of imitations the narrator seems to refer to Grigorii A. Potëmkin (1739-1791), an army officer, politician and lover of Catherine the Great. Potëmkin showed rich scenery of Crimea when he had to present the results of his appropriation of the rather undeveloped peninsula to the Russian monarch and international diplomats. The perception of the cliffs as art in Koktebel', together with the romantic attributes of moonlight, draw upon the symbolist poet Maksimilian A. Voloshin (1877-1932). However, the term "Disneyland for adults" deconstructs the alluring atmosphere as the elusive feelings ("euphoria") and the entire setting are not authentic. As E. Meila states: "Остров Крым – симулякр в бодрийеровском смысле: избыточность всех его знаков ведет к потере конкретной субстанции и аутентичности."<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, the surnames of both protagonists imply a "shine" that reminds us of the moon or rays, respectively. The above passage anticipates Luchnikov and Lunina's break-up. At this intersection of the real and the artificial world, of the past, present and future, of Crimea and Russia, Luchnikov meets (and deconstructs) Lunina while she is studying perfumes in a window display and identifies her as a Soviet citizen:

*Отец, сын, любовь, прошлое и будущее – все соединилось и взбаламутилось непонятной надеждой. Остров и Континент. Россия... Центр жизни, скрещенье дорог.*

23 E. Meila, "Krym u Vasiliiia Aksënova: Ot zhizni k tekstu i obratno", *Krymskii tekst v russkoi kul'ture: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferencii*. Sankt-Peterburg, 4-6<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 2006, eds. Nina Buhks and Mariia Virolajnen, Sankt-Peterburg 2008, pp. 226-234, p. 230; <http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=8917> (access 28 Sept. 2017). "The Island of Crimea is a simulacrum in the sense of Baudrillard: the abundance of all its signs leads to a loss of a concrete substance and authenticity." (My translation.)

*– Танька, – сказал он. – Давай-ка поскорей выбираться из этой чертовой комнаты смеха.*<sup>24</sup>

His order towards her indicates that he tries to pull her out of the bizarre in-between state, offering her a committed relationship. The setting is symbolic. Lunina will remain between the two worlds of Soviet Union and Crimea, between her family and Luchnikov whom she eventually rejects. After Lunina's husband finds out who his rival is and casts Luchnikov out, the narrator shows Andrei's state of mind from the inside. Suddenly, he reveals an emerging solidarity with the *Iaki*-movement Andrei's son stands for, as the rejected hero projects his hatred of Lunina's husband onto the Soviet Union:

*Вот моя родина и вот мое счастье – Остров Крым посреди волн свободы. Мы никогда не сольемся с вами, законопослушные, многомиллионные, северная унылая русская сволочь. Мы не русские по идеологии, мы не коммунисты по национальности, мы яки-островитяне, у нас своя судьба, наша судьба – карнавал свободы, мы сильнее вас, каким бы толстым стеклом вы, суки, не бросали нам в голову!*<sup>25</sup>

However, this incident does not stop Luch-

24 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 46; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, pp. 49-50: "Father, son, love, past, and future all blended together into a vague feeling of expectation and hope. The Island and the continent. Russia. The center of life, the place where all roads converged... 'Tanya,' he said, 'let's get the hell out of this hellhole of a fun house!'"

25 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 133; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 153: "Crimea is my only home, my pride, my joy. The Island of Crimea floating free among the waves. We shall never merge with you, you law-abiding, monumental, hulking, northern, Russian swine, you! We're not Russian by ideology, we're not communist by nationality; we're Yaki Islanders, we have a fate of our own. Our fate is the carnival of freedom, and it makes us stronger, no matter how thick the glass you bastards hurl at our heads!"



nikov in his quest to embrace Soviet culture when he is in Moscow. He uses Sovietisms and tries to understand his 'home country' in order to feel like a 'real' Russian, for example insisting on having a men's talk in the sauna. Nonetheless, Luchnikov's adjustment to Soviet *byt* is characterized like bad mimicry. When he is seen by Lunina wearing Soviet clothes, these artefacts make her react in a negative sense of estrangement<sup>26</sup> – just like when her husband is picking her up in Moscow on her return from Crimea.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of remarks by others who consider his attitude ridiculous,<sup>28</sup> Luchnikov's longing for the Soviet Union is presented as a stronger one than Lunina's longing for Crimea. He is not only desiring but also acting on his dream by importing western pop-cultural goods like jazz records, jeans and shows, when he travels to Moscow.<sup>29</sup> Taking Arjun Appadurai's concept of transculturality into account,<sup>30</sup> Luchnikov fulfills the expectations of his Soviet friends by transmitting the everyday culture of Crimea and the west to Moscow with goods like forbidden music, magazines, and other desired products. Once he forgets to buy western goods, he immediately develops a bad conscience when thinking of it. The narrator uses this opportunity to expand mockingly the long list of goods missed and longed for in the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> To sum up, Luchnikov represents the *convergence* Matich writes about, mainly the western male adventurer as well

as the pre-revolutionary Russian aristocrat and the political activist living for the ideal of a Euro-Soviet Crimean hybridity. His Crimea stands for a cultural medium, an intersection between an old Europe and a new Russia.

### Lunina, the failed spy in a blockbuster

For Lunina, who has an eccentric lifestyle with ups and downs in both places, it seems that the two worlds, Moscow and Crimea, are ambivalent. Her experiences with Luchnikov represent an exception to her Soviet life in Moscow. Yet, what she experiences on Crimea without him is horrible, as she is not able to control her state of mind: Lunina fails to be a spy and a prostitute, becomes an actress in a movie without knowing and later on gets caught up in sexual violence. Thus, the allusion to Aleksandr Grin's romantic fantasy *Alye parusa* (*Red Sails*, 1923), which was about a western nobleman arriving on a boat with red sails and taking his bride from Crimea with him, transforms into an emotional disaster of self-loss. Lunina also acts as cultural transmitter, unlike Luchnikov: By travelling between both places and their cultures she is able to send her 'Crimeanness' to her Moscow environment by (literally) transmitting a subversive message through the way she looks at the TV images: "Такие лица могут незаметно, год за годом, десятилетие за десятилетием, изменять психологическую структуру населения."<sup>32</sup> As the attractive woman, Lunina is cast in the role of a sex object from the point of view of a typical male gaze in both worlds, she symbolically transports the Crimean atmosphere by way of her person-

26 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 187.

27 Ibid., p. 48.

28 The American Buxter is also used for a comment on Luchnikov's vision: He explains that romantic nostalgia is supposed to be the best attitude of mankind. Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 184.

29 Ibid., p. 54.

30 Referring to Arjun Appadurai it might be called a case of a *mediascape*. (Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis et al.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996.)

31 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, pp. 99-100.

32 Ibid., p. 79; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 70: "Year by year, decade by decade, faces like that can imperceptibly alter the psychological structure of the population."

al habits, for instance her style of dress.<sup>33</sup> It is striking that her 'aura' is not a political one – she is not trying to fight the system. Like Luchnikov, she could act subversively against the Soviet Union but actually both of them remain hopeful of a reasonable Soviet Russia. Lunina's attractiveness stands for the Russian absorption of some western leisure culture and also hints at the Black Sea coast, which in the nineteenth century started to develop into the Russian Riviera. We find her interested in the luxurious everyday life on Crimea, but politically she stays loyal to her homeland and, in terms of marriage, to her husband. Becoming a spy radicalizes both her patriotism for the Soviet Union and her fascination for Crimea. Now that she has permission to enter the most forbidden places, the narrator is able to sketch them.<sup>34</sup> Through these stylistic means Aksënov's novel provides visions of several cities, which resemble small copies of western megapolises. Simferopol', the regional capital with the westernized name 'Simfi' is architecturally the most interesting city.<sup>35</sup> Feodosiia is the most stylish one, while Sevastopol' has the most impressive skyscrapers, and Evpatoriia and Gurzuf have the most beautiful villas. While following Lunina on her trips the narrator emphasizes the exceptional features of the most western city, Ialta. This city stands for Crimea's young generation's ideology of demonstrating Ialta as the most non-Soviet place. Lunina's shifting between the two worlds shapes their differences, particularly when the reader observes her problems adapting to a new situation. This happens, for instance, after she returns from Crimea. Estrangement also occurs when she looks at the positive sides of her

regular Soviet life. After a devastating experience during the shooting of a movie that anticipates the novel's ending – a blockbuster on the Soviet annexation of Crimea – she mentally escapes Crimea and her affair with Luchnikov:

*Улечу завтра в Москву, пошлю к черту Лучникова, Сергеева с его фирмой просто на хуй, заберу детей из пионерлагеря, починю машину и все поедem к Суту в Цахкадзор. Буду тренироваться вместе с ним. Только он один меня искренне любит, и я его жена, а он мой муж, он мне все простит, и я буду жить в нашем, в моем мире, где всего не хватает, где все всего боятся, да-да, это более нормальный мир; поступлю куда-нибудь продавицей или кладовщиком на продбазу, буду воровать и чувствовать себя нормальным человеком.*<sup>36</sup>

This accident shows that local Crimeans, unlike Lunina, are conscious of their society being a model, a realized dream and theatrical stage for a possible future Russia. The feeling of being on a theatre stage goes along with the fear that the peninsula might become an international *vertep* (a Ukrainian puppet theatre), as Luchnikov's colleague Gangut says.<sup>37</sup> Final-

36 Ibid., p. 190; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 218: "I'm going to catch the first plane back to Moscow. Screw Luchnikov, screw Sergeev and Co. I'll take the kids out of the Pioneer Camp, have the car repaired, and drive down to Tsakhkadzor with them to visit the Hub. I'll go into training with him. He's the only one who really loves me, I'm his wife, he's my husband, he'll forgive me, and I'll go back to living in our world, my world, a world where you can't get anything you need and everybody's afraid of everything, the real world. I'll find a job selling fruits and vegetables and live a normal life of thievery."

37 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 28: "Безвизный въезд, беспощинная торговля... – все это, конечно, невероятно обогащает наше население, но день за днем мы становимся международным вертепом почище Гонконга." Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 27: "Relaxed visa restrictions. Duty-free trade. It will do wonders for our coffers, all right, but at the rate we're going, we'll end up more a den of international iniquity than Hong Kong itself."

33 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 49.

34 Ibid., p. 167.

35 This is already stated at the beginning of the novel. Ibid., p. 9.

ly, the movie about the reunification of Crimea with Russia, which was already planned in the first third of the novel, becomes not only a vision: “Они снимут гигантский блокбастер о воссоединении Крыма с Россией. Трагический, лирический, иронический, драматический, реалистический и ‘сюр’, в самом своем посыле супер-фильм.”<sup>38</sup> These attributes can be read as a commentary on the novel as rather “tragic, lyrical, ironic, dramatic, realistic and surrealistic”, ending with the destruction of a hybrid Crimea and the end of a dialogue about its development. Finally, we are dealing with an anti-utopia where values are turned upside down as liberal society eventually loses its freedom and independence.

### Cultural hybridity of the Crimean way(s) of life

The Crimean way of life, represented by the protagonists, is politicized – culture goes along with expression of power, regardless of whether the protagonist uses it overtly or implicitly. The novel refers to popular culture in terms of symbols and their purposeful use. The omniscient narrator lets us observe these instrumentalization processes, for instance when Andrei gives a record to his father – the song *Kakhovka* reminds the elder of the Civil War – in order to let him approach the “Idea of a Common Destiny” which Andrei is striving for.<sup>39</sup> In his professional life Luchnikov reflects

38 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 91; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 104: “A blockbuster. A good old-fashioned sweeping epic about the reunification of Crimea and Russia. Tragic, lyric, ironic, dramatic, realistic, surrealistic – a sure winner.”

39 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 18: “Прелюбопытным образом советская ‘Каховка’ стала любимой песней старого врзвакуанта. Лучников-младший, конечно же, с удовольствием подарил отцу пластинку: еще один шаг к Идее Общей Судьбы, которую он проповедовал.” Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 15: “And so the Soviet song ‘Kakhovka’ came to be the favorite of an old provacuee. Needless to say,

about how to use an artefact of mass culture, namely a dissident reportage about the terrible cafés in the Soviet Union. Publishing it in his magazine would allow him to pretend that he advocates anti-Soviet propaganda. In general, the Russian patriot refuses to report negatively about everyday culture in the Soviet Union, which he considers as his country, too.<sup>40</sup> Popular culture, even if it partly appears superficial and emotionally exaggerated, cannot be separated from political culture. Life on Crimea seems to embody the Russian as well as the Soviet longing for the west as a well-off paradise. Correspondingly, everyday culture on the island consists of many elements of popular culture of the western world. Crimea’s *byt* can be regarded as the desired and complementary everyday culture of the Soviet Union, characterized by abundance and density.<sup>41</sup> Its presentation in *Ostrov Krym* distends negative traits of western capitalism as both attractive and decadent through the prism of Crimea: consumerism of luxury goods, lei-

Luchnikov junior was happy to make his father a present of the record. For him it was one more step on the road to the Idea of a Common Fate he so zealously advocated.”

40 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 36: “Да, совсем не трудно переменить курс ‘Курьера’, – подумал он. – Нет ничего легче, чем презирать эту страну, нашу страну, мою, во всяком случае. Кстати, в завтрашнем номере как раз и идет репортаж о советских дорогах. Да-да, как это я забыл, это же внутренний диссидентский материал, ему цены нет. ‘Путешествие через страну кафе’. Анонимный материал из Москвы, талантливое издательство над кошмарными советскими придорожными кафе. Быть может, этого достаточно, чтобы на несколько дней сберечь свою шкуру?” Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 37-38: “True, he thought, it wouldn’t take much to change the *Courier’s* politics. What could be easier than heaping scorn on that country, our country? As a matter of fact, the feature on Soviet roads will be running tomorrow. Right, how could I have let it slip my mind? Dissident material. Priceless. ‘Fast Food on the Road – Soviet Style’ by Anonymous, Moscow. A clever Buchwald-type piece on the nightmares of the Soviet roadside café. Who knows? It may save my skin for a few more days.”

41 Meila, “Krym u Vasiliia Aksënova”, p. 228.

sure activities, the lack of moral restrictions and a prevalence of mass culture seems to exaggerate traits of upper-class tourism. One example is Luchnikov's friend Buturlin telling him he prefers Andrei's son's dandy-like way of life – drinking, enjoying women and sleeping – to that of his own children who play Haydn, Stravinsky, Rakhmaninov and Handel.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, in these intellectual salons condemned by Buturlin, the aristocracy socializes like in the nineteenth century, continuing a tradition of Russian piano playing.<sup>43</sup> Speaking with Olga Matich, Aksënov defends “the ultimate superiority of art to life”, as embodied through Luchnikov and Buturlin.<sup>44</sup> Aksënov's Crimea shows features of a technologically, aesthetically and economically developed international but still Russian society: These Crimeans live without passports, speak several languages and are allowed to move freely.<sup>45</sup> Here the elitism is evident, especially regarding access to symbolic resources such as education at the best European universities and the freedom of travel. It is a society for a select, aristocratic and well-to-do minority. Liberal mass culture is depicted as attractive and criticized simultaneously. Crimea even seems to be a place of *razvrat* (depravity):

*В первые послесталинские годы Остров потерял уже свою мрачную, исключаящую всякие вопросы формулировку, но от этого не приблизился, а, как ни странно, даже отдалился от России. Возник образ подозрительного злчного места, международного притона, Эльдорадо авантюристов, шпионов: Там были американские военные базы, стриптизы, джаз, буги-вуги, словом, Крым еще дальше отошел от*

*России, подтянулся в кильватер всяким там Гонконгам, Сингапурам, Гонолулу, стал как бы символом западного разврата, что отчасти соответствовало действительности.*<sup>46</sup>

The heteroglossy of the novel is contained not only in the coexistence of differences but also in the hybridity, as demonstrated particularly in the fictitious Crimean language containing many loanwords from English. The language “Iaki” is defined as “смесь татарщины и русятины” (“a mixture of Tatar and Russian”).<sup>47</sup> This language and national culture are considered to be the best possible: “Яки – это хорошо, это среднее между ‘якши’ и ‘окей’, это формирующаяся сейчас нация Острова Крыма, составленная из потомков татар, итальянцев, болгар, греков, турок, русских войск и британского флота.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, Iaki-nationalists suppress Russian, Tatar and English speaking cultures in order to establish a Iaki-culture and language. Evidently, the novel ignores Ukrainian culture. Besides the melting of different cultures, the novel is structured by balancing the forces between the Russian past, the Soviet present and a westernized conglomeration that could

46 Ibid., p. 56; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, pp. 62-63: “Although during the early post-Stalin years the Island was no longer reduced to that one rigid, all-encompassing sentence, it did not thereby move any closer to Russia; in fact, it moved farther away. It gained the reputation of a den of iniquity, a suspicious international playground, an El Dorado of spies and adventurers. With its American military bases and striptease joints, its jazz and boogie-woogie, it seemed another Hong Kong, Singapore, Honolulu, a symbol of western decadence. And to a certain extent it was.”

47 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 22; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 20.

48 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 24; Aksyonov, *The Island of Crimea*, p. 22: “Yaki is a combination of ‘okay’ and ‘yahşi’, a Turkish word for ‘good’. It is a nation currently taking shape here on the Island of Crimea and includes the descendants of Tatars, Italians, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Turks, of the Russian army and the British navy.”

42 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, pp. 25-26.

43 Ibid., p. 174.

44 Matich, “Vasilii Aksënov and the Literature of Convergence”, p. 643.

45 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 57.

serve as a model for the future. This triangle is realized mimetically (arguing in dialogues about different political attitudes), diegetically (de- and evaluating cultural features, material objects, habits etc. of all involved cultural codes), symbolically (with the help of the two main protagonists) and compositionally, too: from chapter to chapter the novel switches locations, the action is set in the Soviet Union, mainly Moscow, Crimea and Paris. Speaking of ambivalence, Aksënov anticipates postcolonial concepts of hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry put forward by Homi Bhabha,<sup>49</sup> in particular the attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and the colonized. Instead of impersonators, ambivalence produces subjects “whose mimicry is never very far from mockery” and who “produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse.”<sup>50</sup> In these terms, Aksënov’s Crimea can be described as a *third place* in the sense of Edward Soja – a realized alternative amalgamation conveyed in a surrealistic style. While the “firstplace” is a measurable, segmented material space and “secondplace” a purely mental construction,

*thirdplace is the space where all spaces are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood. [...] Any attempt to capture this all-encompassing space in words and texts, for example, invokes an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that the sequentiality of language and writing, of the narrative form and history-tell-*

*ing, can never do more than scratch the surface of Thirdplace’s extraordinary simultaneities.*<sup>51</sup> The cultural hybridity of the island provokes two contradictory questions: Are we dealing with a mirroring parody of Soviet culture where high culture (music, opera, ballet and, last but not least: literature) is meant to be accessible to the masses? Or are we dealing with criticism of western culture, which lacks the Soviet Union’s idealism, and thus any profound meaning of life? In its paradox simultaneity of ingratiation to western freedom and criticism of western mass culture, the novel actually performs a key concept of Russian culture. Aleksandr Kabakov calls the novel a “warning” (“roman-preduprezhdenie”)<sup>52</sup> and, besides, a “bytovoi roman” (“novel of everyday life”) in which the love stories do not appeal to the reader’s empathy as they are more sexual than emotional.<sup>53</sup> Although the political systems of Crimea and the Soviet Union are completely different in this novel, they resemble each other in their non-transparency, surveillance and power-driven decision-making. Assuming this parallelity, everyday culture is a means of identity shaping – it acquires the role of conveying the most striking differences you can experience between the island and its ‘Big Brother’ in both political spheres.

### Intercultural and intertextual points of contact

As Michael Idov points out, the novel is taken into account whenever Russia comes to a turning point as it captures the principal duality of Russia which “is both the island and the

49 Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, *October* 28, 1984, pp. 125-133.

50 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 13.

51 Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, London: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 56-58.

52 Aleksandr Kabakov and Evgenij Popov, *Aksënov*, Moskva: AST, 2001, p. 369.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 367.



mainland, a reef of free thought and a colossus poised to stomp it out of existence".<sup>54</sup> To the contemporary Soviet reader, the novel has probably invited giggles of dizzy disorientation: "A skyscraper—in Simferopol! The idea that a newspaper can be called a 'Russian' (as opposed to 'Soviet') anything, let alone an ultra-bourgeois 'Courier'! Where in the world *are* we? Where we are, in fact, is not in an earnest counter-historical what-if but instead inside the eternal fever dream of the Russian intellectual: what Russia could have been if not for the path it chose. While Aksyonov paints the neighboring U.S.S.R. as an inferno of scarcity, cruelty, and idiocy—somehow managing to sound like an outside observer (he wrote the book just before emigrating to the United States)—he can't help gleefully stuffing his imaginary Crimea with every cool thing that a Soviet hipster could think of: high-speed freeways, a hopping jazz scene, swinger clubs, an auto industry producing Peter-Turbo roadsters and luxurious Russo-Balt cars (an actual brand whose production ceased with the revolution), Novy Svet champagne, posh villas, Burgessian Russo-Anglo-Tatar youth slang, and a tony night club named after Nabokov. And then he proceeds to throw it all under the Russian tank tracks."<sup>55</sup> In this fictional Crimea, the Whites and their offspring have established a pre-revolutionary society with three different political parties, all antagonistic towards the Soviet Union. In the narrative, capturing the late 1960s and 1970s, the island's opposition towards the Soviet Union is depicted as unstable. Herein we can indicate the crucial dialogical moment of

a communication between the proposed visions. On the one hand, we encounter some affirmation of the new Soviet Union without Stalin whereas, on the other hand, we face its renunciation as there is still some home for a return to pre-revolutionary society and an orientation towards Western European life. The novel does not align itself with a special – utopian or dystopian – tradition of writing on Crimea, as it contradicts its own positive picture at the end. It still corresponds with the so called *Crimea-text* which tends to glorify the peninsula as a Russian project of (over-) Europeanness and to regard it as a welcomed southern supplement to the northern country, and, so to speak, its paradisiac garden.<sup>56</sup> The *Crimea-text*, Aleksandr Liusyi's term in accordance with Vladimir Toporov's *Petersburg-text* (*Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury*),<sup>57</sup> assumes an intertextual network of sujets, figures and symbols in the Russian literature of the classicism, romanticism and symbolism, coined by canonical poems, stories, pictures and becoming part of popular Russian culture, too.<sup>58</sup> In sum, thanks to the intertextuality of medial representations, the fictional Crimea has grown into a popular, common and community strengthening *locus amoenus*, a vivid imagination of an arcadian place with high symbolical value. Apparently, the novel's polyphony is a parallel to Aksyonov's trilogy *Ozhog* (*The Burn*, Ann Arbor 1980). Here, the narrative presents different social environments in Moscow, includ-

54 Michael Idov, "The Novel that Predicts Russia's Invasion of Crimea", *The New Yorker*, 2 March 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-novel-that-predicts-russias-invasion-of-crimea>, accessed 25 October 2017.

55 Ibid.

56 Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums: Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich*, Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007, p. 136; Elisabeth W. Clowes, *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 116.

57 Vladimir N. Toporov, *Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury: izbrannye trudy*, Sankt-Peterburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003.

58 Aleksandr Liusyi, *Krymskii tekst v russkoi literature*, Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteija, 2003, p. 15: 195.

ing its underground and dissident milieu, by using polyperspectivism, exaggeration, mixing language codes and provocative allusions. As Per Dalgård states, the grotesque and polyphonic narrative with its overlapping of the fantastic and the realistic, of avantgardism and realism and its ambivalence towards the opposite ends of a spectrum, like the old vs. the new, the beginning vs. the end of the metamorphosis is fundamental to Aksënov's works.<sup>59</sup> Dalgård refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the grotesque's dialectical dimension as a means of estrangement that can have a satirical function dominating composition as well as style.<sup>60</sup> The grotesque style tends to use folk and folklore elements.<sup>61</sup> In the novel discussed here, these are supplemented by linguistic elements, material culture and social practices of Soviet and western everyday culture, hence contributing to the novel's partly grotesque ambiguity. The novel's western orientation appears to be anti-Soviet: Moscow and its function as an imperial capital are not taken seriously by the *Iaki* speakers who sharpen the de-ideologization of Soviet speech patterns. This attitude spans from the ironic use of Soviet abbreviations and slogans<sup>62</sup> to mockery of 'Soviet' literary style.<sup>63</sup> Soviet literature is vilified by the narrator or provokes some nostalgia in terms of the interesting Soviet literature hav-

ing disappeared as many of the *Shestidesiatniki* have left.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the intertextual reference to George Orwell stresses the text's orientation towards western political satire. By contrast, the novel shows solidarity with pre-Soviet Russian literature as Aksënov's style demonstrates similarities to that of Andrei Belyi and Nikolai Gogol'.<sup>65</sup> There are also allusions to Mandelshtam and Chekhov.<sup>66</sup> Actually, the question of geocultural development has occupied Russian literature and philosophy since Peter the Great's policy of Europeanization. Olga Matich states that Aksënov's text represents a pronounced self-criticism and a kind of parody on other literary parodies of his time.<sup>67</sup> The irony runs parallel to the grotesque ambivalence and can be read as anti-utopian pessimism: The novel leaves a rather non-entertaining message about a problematic future with the cultural and political dialogue interrupted. Aleksandr Kabakov stresses that *Ostrov*

64 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, p. 58.

65 Aksënov's poetic style has parallels to that of Nikolai Gogol: "1.) use of poetic devices: play with sound, rhythm, alliteration, repetition etc., 2.) retardation of the epic narrative; lack of the conventional, logical-causal development of plot, character and action, replaced by 3.) development of a lyrical theme shown in its various aspects, from different points of view, creating a mosaic of motives, symbols, themes etc." Per Dalgård, "Some Literary Roots of Aksënov's Writings: Affinities and Parallels", *Vasilij Pavlovich Aksënov: A Writer in Quest of Himself*, ed. Edward Mozheiko, Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1986, pp. 68-86, here pp. 69-70.

66 Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym*, pp. 131, 165.

67 "In the broadest sense, then, *Ostrov Krym* reflects the demythologizing tendency in post-Stalin Soviet literature, a tendency that began with the revision of socialist realism and the Stalinist version of Soviet history. Although the novel contains dissident political ideas and satirical images of Soviet reality, it is first and foremost self-critical, demythologizing Aksënov's own utopian motifs of the 1960s – the supermen heroes and beautiful ladies in western garb who put their faith in the magically simple convergence panacea. Exposing liberal ideology, *Ostrov Krym* presents grad secular causes in the name of the people as naive, perfidious, and self-serving." (Matich, "Vasilij Aksënov and the Literature of Convergence", p. 651.)

59 Per Dalgård, *The Function Of The Grotesque In Vasilij Aksënov*, transl. by Robert Porter, Århus: Arkona 1982, pp. 5 and 11.

60 Ibid., pp. 14, 20, 24.

61 Ibid., p. 29.

62 Anatoly Vishevsky and Timothy Pogacar, "The Function of Conventional Language Pattern in the Prose of Vassilij Aksënov", *Vasilij Pavlovich Aksënov: A Writer in Quest of Himself*, ed. Edward Mozheiko, Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1986, pp. 131-146, here pp. 135-7.

63 Ibid., p. 136. The authors tell the following example: "For instance, a KGB officer in *The Island of Crimea* paraphrases the well known lines of Pavel Korchagin from Nikolay Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*." Ibid., p. 143.

*Krym* occupies an outstanding position within Russian literature of the twentieth century: Following the publication of Evgenii Zamiatin's *My (We)* from 1920, anti-utopian novels were en vogue for a brief period, but for the next three decades no anti-utopias were published either in the USSR or in exile.<sup>68</sup>

\* \* \*

In Aksënov's novel, the Soviet Union represents the Other with the ambiguity of a cultural double-bind. It represents the Russianness Luchnikov is looking for, and the background for Lunina's imagination of a better life. Interweaving the protagonists' destinies, the narration demonstrates the aesthetical productivity of confronting different ways of life. Thus, the novel offers not only an alternative history, suggesting an anti-Soviet, old-fashioned pro-tsarist concept,<sup>69</sup> but an open discussion of three evolved cultural mindsets, which are all crucial for Russian self-conception: pre-revolutionary Russian, Soviet and European. There is actually a fourth: Crimean hybridity. Aksënov's novel can be read as part of the underground pop culture in the late Soviet Union as well as a space for discussion of its non-official, desired, demanded or dreaded cultural vectors. Leaving the novel's opposition towards Soviet culture aside, the heteroglossy of cultural issues makes this text interesting for cultural studies focusing on the late Soviet Union. We

can observe the negotiation of mass culture(s) as a prospective vision for the Soviet Union. The novel does not try to preserve, insist or convince of one possible way, but rather asks: *quo vadis?* Exposing his readers to all possibilities in an ambivalent, at times grotesque manner, Aksënov challenges them to continue the dialogue of Russian and Un-Russian ideas.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tatjana Hofmann studied Cultural, Slavonic and Germanic Studies at Humboldt-University in Berlin. Afterwards she wrote her PhD-thesis about the representation of Ukraine in contemporary prose (*Literarische Ethnografien der Ukraine*, Basel 2014). Since 2012 she has worked at the Slavic Department of the University of Zurich where she was editor member of the literature magazine *Variations*. From 2012 to 2014 she was associated in the project *Region, Nation, and Beyond: An Interdisciplinary and Transcultural Reconsideration of Ukraine* at the University of St. Gallen. She edited works by Sergei Tret'iakov. Currently she writes a study on Soviet journalism and travellogues. Crimea belongs to her areas of interests.

<sup>68</sup> Kabakov and Popov, *Aksënov*, p. 366.

<sup>69</sup> Aleksandr Kabakov says about *Ostrov Krym* and its writer: "Мифология русского белого движения, апологетика царской России. То есть он на какое-то время отошел от своего либерального ухмылочного отношения к тому нашему прошлому." Kabakov and Popov, *Aksënov*, p. 91.

## Pop and Politics in Late Soviet Society. Final remarks

by Peter Collmer

More than ten years ago, Alexei Yurchak published his influential study about late Soviet socialism.<sup>1</sup> In Yurchak's narrative, the persistence of the Soviet system after Stalin's death largely relied on a series of inter-related paradoxes that undermined and at the same time stabilized the system. The ongoing formal reproduction of the system was accompanied by internal "displacements": The more the dogmatic forms of the authoritative discourse were reproduced and ritualized since the 1950s, the more this discourse was detached from socialist realities, making room for alternative, less controllable interpretations of Soviet life. As long as Soviet people duly participated in the formal reproduction of the system, they were allowed to explore new creative ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Thus, being within and simultaneously outside the official discourse became a "dominant mode of living during late socialism".<sup>2</sup> This mode of living cannot be understood in simple terms of support or opposition; it was rather characterized by the dissolution of binary categories and by a multilayer relationship with the system.

What makes Yurchak's interpretation of late Soviet socialism interesting for this publication is the fact that it can be referred to as a theoretical framework for discussing Soviet pop. The above articles conceptualize post-Stalinist Soviet popular culture as a set of cultural practices that were attractive to many Soviet citizens even if – or just because of the fact that – they did not fully correspond with the demands of the system. They covered a vast field of everyday activities and forms of self-rep-

resentation (fashion, music, dance, mass literature, leisure activities, gestures, manners of speaking etc.), mostly inspired by the global spread and imitation of American and British lifestyles since the 1950s. Pop cultural practices were not necessarily directed against the Soviet party-state complex, but they were not entirely controlled by it either, appealing especially to young people as a sphere of freedom and sometimes subversive self-reassurance.

Following Yurchak, Soviet pop could be seen as an alternative approach to socialist reality enabled by the "performative shift"<sup>3</sup> of the authoritative discourse. As performing loyalty gained importance over being loyal, new ways of identity building became possible. In such an understanding, Soviet pop culture was a context where people had the chance to express their thoughts, feelings and attitudes without being restricted to the literal reading of a petrified ideology. However, the relation between the officially promoted way of life and the manifestations of a new, grass-root-driven popular culture remained complicated and subject to a continuous process of negotiation.

While analyzing different aspects of Soviet popular culture, most articles of this publication take Yurchak's narrative into consideration, some of them even explicitly discuss the scopes – and the limits – of its explanatory power. They all shed light on ambivalences and paradoxes that become visible when studying Soviet pop. In this context, the "paradoxicality" of the Soviet system does not only refer to obvious inconsistencies or contradictions of late Soviet socialism; it also

1 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

2 Ibid., p. 288.

3 Ibid., pp. 24-26.

points to new complex forms of “normal life”<sup>4</sup> that developed in a specific process of social and cultural modernization.

### Paradox normalities

The two first contributions focus on fundamental tensions that characterized Soviet life and culture after Stalin’s death in 1953. In his text on the Thaw period, *Gleb Tsipursky* deals with the fact that post-Stalinist authorities eased ideological constraints while at the same time exerting symbolic and physical violence against certain cultural practices that seemed to express an extreme devotion to western culture. Focusing on the example of the “stiliagi” (“style-obsessed” young people) and western-like fashion, the author shows how, since the 1950s, the boundaries of acceptable youth behavior were constantly challenged, negotiated and redefined. *Danijela Lugarić Vukas* points to the concurrent living within and outside the system. A close reading of the poetry of the two famous Russian bards Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotskii illustrates how, for most Soviet people, resistance and loyalty merged into a complex attitude towards the authoritative discourse – a discourse whose literal claims and meanings were increasingly met with indifference.<sup>5</sup>

Most articles are, in one way or another, concerned with paradoxes resulting from the multifaceted western influences on Soviet life. *Irina Mukhina* shows that being close to the west or having easy access to western

products did not necessarily result in a westernization of Soviet identities. Her contribution about consumerism in Soviet port cities during the 1970s and 80s (including the case of “Baba Mania”, an old woman receiving illegal goods from sailors and reselling them in Novorossiisk) suggests that close intercultural contact did not blind Soviet people, but rather sharpened their critical view on the west and the quality and usefulness of its products. Analyzing youth cultures in eastern Ukraine during the international détente of the 1970s, *Sergei I. Zhuk* demonstrates the striking fact that cultural westernization fostered the process of russification on the peripheries of the Soviet empire. Professional Russian media, Russian urban culture and the Russian language played a key role in making western popular culture available to the Soviet youth in the province.

Other texts exemplify the paradox situation that western-inspired technologies and cultural practices sometimes contributed or even consciously were used to strengthen the socialist system. *Kirsten Bönker’s* article on TV consumption in late Soviet society shows how the massive spread of TV sets in the Soviet Union after the late 1960s made it possible to integrate a diverse audience into an emotional community “in front of the screens”. TV programs presented a positive version of Soviet normality. By doing so, they promoted a new appealing Soviet popular culture and sustained the cohesion of Soviet society rather than – as claimed by previous research – destabilizing it. This is remarkable, taking into account that early Soviet TV makers, as shown in *Kristian Feigelson’s* contribution, did not have a clear understanding of the impact of the new medium. One example of how Soviet TV could turn western influence against the west is given in *Isabelle de Keghel’s* article

4 For the concept of “normal life” and “normalization” see for example Kirsten Bönker’s article in this volume.

5 However, the literal reading of the authoritative discourse did not completely lose its importance. According to Sergei Zhuk’s text in this volume, personal diaries written by young Soviet people in provincial Ukrainian towns during the 1970s and 80s suggest that their interpretation of the world was still heavily influenced by official ideology.



on the popular television series “Seventeen Moments of Spring” (1973). The Brezhnev-era series about a Soviet spy who mingles undercover with the Nazi leadership during the Second World War has certain features of a socialist James Bond movie. It draws the audience’s attention to foreign threats and reproduces official images of the capitalist enemy within the framework of the Cold War.

A number of articles elucidate the ability of late Soviet society to integrate antagonistic impulses and to create new complex normalities. In his text about the “invasion of Estonian music” in the Soviet Union after the mid-seventies, *Aimar Ventsel* shows how an informal profit-oriented music industry emerged within the centrally controlled socialist economy. Popular Baltic musicians who acted as a substitute for western pop stars throughout the Soviet Union were given opportunities to pursue economic interests and to manipulate official regulations. *Boris Belge’s* article about Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) illustrates how, during late Soviet socialism, traditional elite culture and popular culture could merge into something new, into a “third direction” of cultural production that bridged the gap between traditional labels and tried to be “serious” and “popular” at the same time. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this specific form of integration lost its formative context and disappeared again.

Finally, on a more abstract level, the paradoxes and antagonisms of Soviet society are discussed in *Tatjana Hofmann’s* analysis of “*Ostrov Krym*”, a novel by Vasilii Aksenov (written in 1979). Aksenov’s *Crimea* is conceived of as a place between the worlds, an island where pre-revolutionary Russian, Soviet and European traditions come together. Referring to Bakhtin, Hofmann speaks of a semantical space for different, even antagonis-

tic “cultural voices”. Their interplay points to one of the fundamental historical tensions that characterized both Tsarist and Soviet Russia’s relations with the west – the simultaneity of admiring and rejecting western culture.

In view of the above, one of the obvious contributions of this publication consists in reconsidering and further illustrating the ambivalences, tensions, and inconsistencies of late Soviet society. However, most articles also show that the citizens of the late Soviet Union did not necessarily experience their environment as fragmented or inconsistent. The study of popular culture in particular makes clear that the coexistence of various influences, fashions, consumer habits and tastes was part of “normal” Soviet life.

## Conclusions

By focusing on specific periods of time, geographical areas, cultural practices and leisure activities, the articles of this volume complement the already known, many-faceted picture of Soviet popular culture since the 1950s. They look at Soviet pop in the context of global trends in (youth) culture after the war and challenge narratives of a relatively uniform, gray and immutable way of life in the Soviet Union.

The articles shed new light on Soviet people’s agency. It becomes evident how the worldwide emergence of pop culture influenced cultural life in the Soviet Union as well and provided ordinary Soviet citizens with inspirations and opportunities to explore new forms of acting and expressing themselves. In this context people were pushing the limits of what was officially acceptable and contributed to redefining cultural and political norms. At the same time, the discrepancies of everyday life

in the Soviet Union encouraged individuals to develop strategies of “navigating the system”, to take advantage of the offerings and deficiencies of the system and to build their own coherent living environment.

In general, the well-researched chronology of cultural negotiation processes since Stalin’s death<sup>6</sup> becomes manifest also in this volume. During the early Thaw period (1953-56), the authorities allowed for a relaxation of ideological control and new ways of cultural expression such as wearing western-like clothing. Gleb Tsipursky’s text illustrates how the Kremlin, in his attempt to build a socialist version of modernity, returned to an anti-pluralistic policy in the mid-1950s, stigmatizing alleged excesses of fashion-conscious young people. The early 1960s saw a renewed tendency to more openness that was reflected for example in a certain de-politicization of TV production. A “turn toward militancy”<sup>7</sup> followed under Brezhnev by the end of the decade. Isabelle de Kegel demonstrates how film production under Brezhnev partly fell back to Stalin-era patterns. The relaxation of international tensions in the 1970s enabled a cultural rapprochement with the west and, as shown in Sergei Zhuk’s article, made audio and visual information from capitalist countries more and more available even in provincial cities of the Soviet Union.

The articles confirm the usefulness of certain theoretical perspectives for the study of Soviet popular culture. The idea of an “Imaginary West” can help understand the complex relationship between Soviet popular culture and its western sources of inspiration.<sup>8</sup> As shown

by several authors, “western” stimuli that influenced Soviet cultural life usually did not emanate directly from the west but from a distorted image of the western world that developed in Soviet society after the war. This image of the west remained anchored in Soviet ways of thinking, feeling and longing, thus revealing more about living in the Soviet Union than about the west. It thereby becomes clear that Soviet pop did not just imitate a foreign model. Within the contact zone between the Soviet empire and the west, it rather constituted a new context based on entangling cultural influences. It drew on processes of cultural transfer and translation and contained numerous transnational references.<sup>9</sup>

Researchers often concentrate on the cultural settings of Moscow and Leningrad. In contrast, some of the above articles show that cultural life in the urban centers was not representative for the entire Soviet Union. For example, Irina Mukhina points to the fact that residents of small port cities had a different understanding of western lifestyles. They usually did not associate the consumption of western goods with resistance or subversion (as was more often the case in the capital cities) but conceived of them as a means of improving their social status within Soviet society. In this context it becomes obvious that the “west” was not imagined in an identical way throughout the Union. An unrealistic, glorified image seems to have developed within urban centers, in close correlation with people’s desires and tastes. However, direct confrontation with the real west could disenchant its imaginary facade, reassuring Soviet identities.

If it is common to look at Soviet pop against

6 Cf. for example Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945-1970*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016, p. 15.

7 Ibid.

8 See for example Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*,

pp. 158-206.

9 For the concept of the “contact zone” see Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession*, 1991, pp. 33-40.

the background of the Cold War and its “cultural front”, some of the above articles demonstrate that new forms of cultural expression also had their important economic dimensions. As shown in the texts of Aimar Ventsel, Irina Mukhina and others, the growing popularity of pop stimulated self-reinforcing dynamics of consumerism, black or grey markets and an intertwining of official institutions and informal profit strategies.

In the overall picture, this publication joins recent research in arguing that many facets of Soviet pop culture, even if inspired by the western “class enemy”, contributed to stabilizing rather than destabilizing the Soviet system.<sup>10</sup> Popular cultural practices, shared tastes and new media such as television in particular facilitated the formation of emotional communities whose loyalty toward the Soviet system could be influenced by satisfying selected consumer needs, by offering good entertainment and by using innovative technology to promote the promise of a bright socialist future.<sup>11</sup> In conjunction with the “performative shift” of the authoritative discourse, Soviet pop culture afforded Soviet citizens new opportunities

to socialize with each other, to interpret their lives and to express themselves within a centrally controlled environment. In this sense, a successful Soviet version of pop could reduce the explosive power of people’s longing for the (imagined) west.

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Peter Collmer is Lecturer at the University of Zurich. He wrote his doctoral dissertation about bilateral relations between Russia and Switzerland in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, he published a volume containing ego documents of Swiss emigrants living in Russia and the Soviet Union. In 2018, he completed his post-doctoral habilitation at the University of Zurich based on a study about the cultures of rule in 18th century Poland-Lithuania. His main research interests include historical entanglements between Eastern and Western Europe, migration history, and the cultural history of bureaucracy.

10 Regarding the stabilizing effects of new consumer practices in the 1970s see for example Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, London, New York: Routledge, 2013.

11 Regarding the potential of television for building up emotional communities see for example Christine Evans, “The ‘Soviet Way of Life’ as a Way of Feeling: Emotion and Influence on Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev Era”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 56/2-3, 2015, pp. 543–69.

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Cover image: "Beetls". Drawing from the notebook of Oleg Grin, a 13-year old boy from Vatutino (Cherkasy Region, Soviet Ukraine), written in May 1972. The inscription on the drums probably refers to the Polish skiffle band No To Co. Private collection Sergei I. Zhuk.

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